

MULTI
AWARD
WINNING!

SCIENCE + ANIMALS + PUZZLES + PEOPLE + ARTS + PHOTOS + BOOKS + SPORTS + BERRY THE RED PANDA

THE WORLD'S BEST NEWS & FACTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

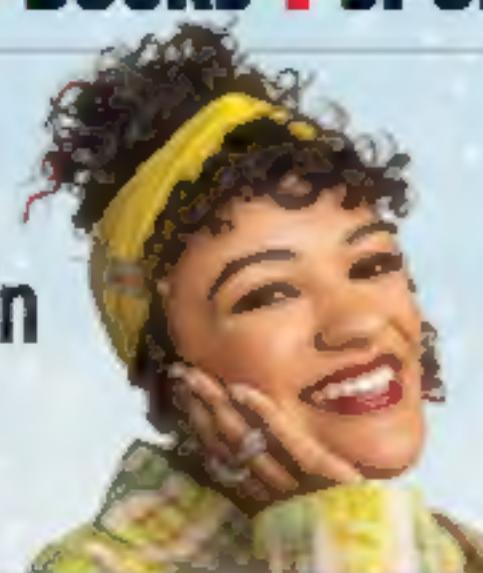
NEWS

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Making sense of the world

THE WEEK Junior

THE BEST
MAGAZINE FOR
CURIOS
KIDS

PEACE ON EARTH



COVER
CONTEST
WINNER!
JOSIE, AGE 12



This week's big news



An Olympic bell



Notre-Dame has 21 bells, including three new ones. One of these (above) was a gift from the Paris 2024 Olympics organizing committee. During the Games this summer, the bell was rung by each track and field winner at the Stade de France. It is now above the altar and will ring during Mass at the church.

Notre-Dame Cathedral reopens

On December 7 in Paris, France, the historic Notre-Dame Cathedral reopened to the public for the first time since it was damaged by a fire in 2019. At an elaborate ceremony, French President Emmanuel Macron hosted dignitaries from around the world after delivering on a bold promise to reopen the landmark within five years.

What is Notre-Dame?

For nearly 900 years, the soaring Catholic church has stood at the center of Paris, serving as a symbol of France. With its pointed arches, high towers, and flying buttresses (arched exterior supports), Notre-Dame is a famous example of Gothic architecture. Construction began in 1163 and continued for more than 180 years. Notre-Dame's bells were built in the 1200s. Other features include 150-foot-high curved wood ceilings, marble floors, and stained-glass windows.

What happened in the fire?

Officials said the fire on April 15, 2019, started in the attic, in a section of wood beams built in the 1200s known as "the forest," where renovations were taking place at the time. The fire's exact cause is unknown, although investigators said it was likely started by an electrical malfunction or a lit cigarette. As the fire

burned, people in France and around the world watched in horror while more than 500 firefighters worked to contain the blaze. They saved the towers and bells but were unable to prevent the spire and most of the roof from collapsing.

What happened at the ceremony?

At the start of the two-hour ceremony, the archbishop of Paris (high-ranking church official) tapped three times on the cathedral's massive front doors with his staff, which was built from a roof beam that survived the fire. The doors swung open to reveal the interior as the voices of a children's choir filled the air. Firefighters, rescue workers, and builders walked in to a standing ovation from the audience, which included US First Lady Dr. Jill Biden, President-elect Donald Trump, Prince William of the UK, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. "The bells of

Notre-Dame are ringing again," Macron said in a speech. He expressed gratitude to everyone who worked on the renovation and said the cathedral was now "even more beautiful." The reopening was a bright spot in a period of political turmoil for Macron and the nation. France's prime minister resigned on December 5, and Macron is facing calls to step down.

How was the cathedral rebuilt?

The renovation cost nearly \$900 million, much of which was donated by people around the world, including about 40,000 donors in the US. About 2,000 workers, including architects, engineers, and stained-glass artists, used ancient methods and materials to restore, repair, or replace what was damaged in the fire. Crews harvested about 2,000 oak trees from forests around Europe, some of them as many as 400 years old. The wood was used for many of the repairs, including a re-creation of the forest. Stone experts cut 7,000 new blocks of limestone for the walls and ceiling and restored or re-carved gargoyles. Crews built a reproduction of the 315-foot spire, which was originally added in 1860. The grand organ, which has 8,000 pipes, was cleaned and rebuilt. Crews also used modern tools, including drones and robots, to assist in the effort.



The front of Notre-Dame

What will happen next?

The first public Mass at Notre-Dame since 2019 was held on December 8. Visitors can now return to the cathedral, but reservations are required. Before the fire, about 13 million tourists from around the world visited each year, and about 15 million people are expected to visit in the next year. Repair work will continue on parts of the cathedral that are still unfinished.

This week's big news



Rebel forces take over Syria

On December 8, the president of Syria, Bashar al-Assad, fled the country as his government collapsed and rebels took control of Damascus, the capital. Assad had led the Middle Eastern country since taking over from his father in 2000. He was brought down by rebel forces in a 12-day offensive that surprised Syrians and world leaders.

Assad's government had been engaged in a brutal civil war with rebel groups since 2011. Like his father, Assad used harsh tactics to punish his opponents. During the war, more than 500,000 people died, millions fled Syria, and more than 150,000 people were imprisoned. Russia and Iran had been supporting Assad, but they had recently been weakened by wars of their own. That gave the rebels an opportunity to take over.

Assad fled to Russia as Syrians celebrated, and many who had left the country said they hoped to return. A rebel group called Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) set up a temporary government. HTS has been named a terrorist group by the US, but its leader said its focus is on rebuilding the country.



IT'S AN AMAZING WEEK FOR...

GOING ELECTRIC

Pope Francis, the head of the worldwide Catholic Church, is riding in a new electric vehicle. The Popemobile, as it's known, releases zero harmful emissions. Francis often encourages people to protect the environment.



The new EV



Pysanka eggs from Ukraine

DID YOU KNOW?

UNESCO was founded by the United Nations in 1946, after World War II, and now has 194 member states.

Additions to cultural heritage list

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has added 63 items to its List of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The list includes performing arts, rituals, traditional crafts, foods, and social practices that are significant and worthy of safeguarding.

Among the new additions is Pysanka, a centuries-old Ukrainian art of decorating eggs using wax and dye (see photo above). The eggs are an Easter tradition that are also given as gifts on important occasions. Mongolia's nomadic culture, which builds community and helps protect the land, was also included. Soapmaking techniques from Palestine and Syria, as well as giant, colorful kites made in Guatemala, were also added.

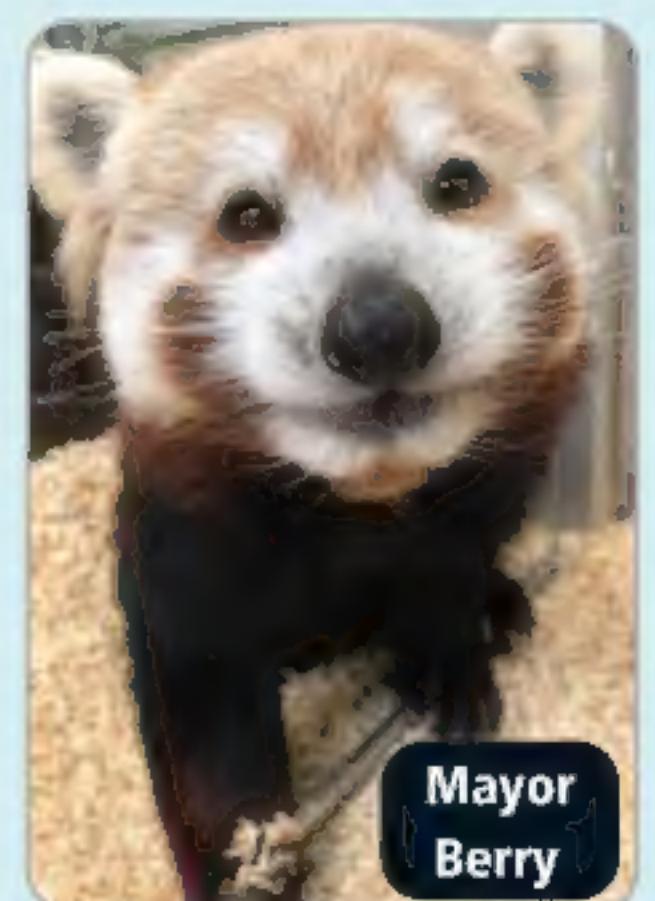
The additions included traditional clothing from several countries. In North Korea, the outfits

require detailed embroidery, drawing, and sewing and are used for special occasions. They instill "a sense of cultural belonging, identity, and continuity," UNESCO said. Foods that gained recognition included Minas cheese from Brazil and cassava bread made in Cuba, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Honduras, and Venezuela. Traditions from Ghana, Myanmar, Rwanda, Somalia, and Brunei were added to the list for the first time.

Being featured on the list raises awareness of cultural heritage and offers protection. UNESCO works to preserve each addition through documentation, promotion, education, funding, and expert advice. There are nearly 800 entries from 150 countries on the list so far. "It is our great responsibility to promote this heritage," said Audrey Azoulay, the head of UNESCO.

AN ELECTION WINNER

Berry the red panda has been sworn in as mayor of Connecticut's Beardsley Zoo. Berry, who won the most votes in an online election, will be the furry face of the zoo's conservation, education, and community efforts in 2025. She takes over for retiring mayor Tahu, a North American river otter. "We're thrilled to see Berry take the reins," the zoo said.



Mayor Berry

LOVE LATE IN LIFE

Marjorie Fiterman, age 102, and Bernie Littman, age 100, set a world record as the oldest couple to get married. The newlyweds met at their senior living facility in Pennsylvania and started dating about 10 years ago. "They keep each other young," said Littman's granddaughter.

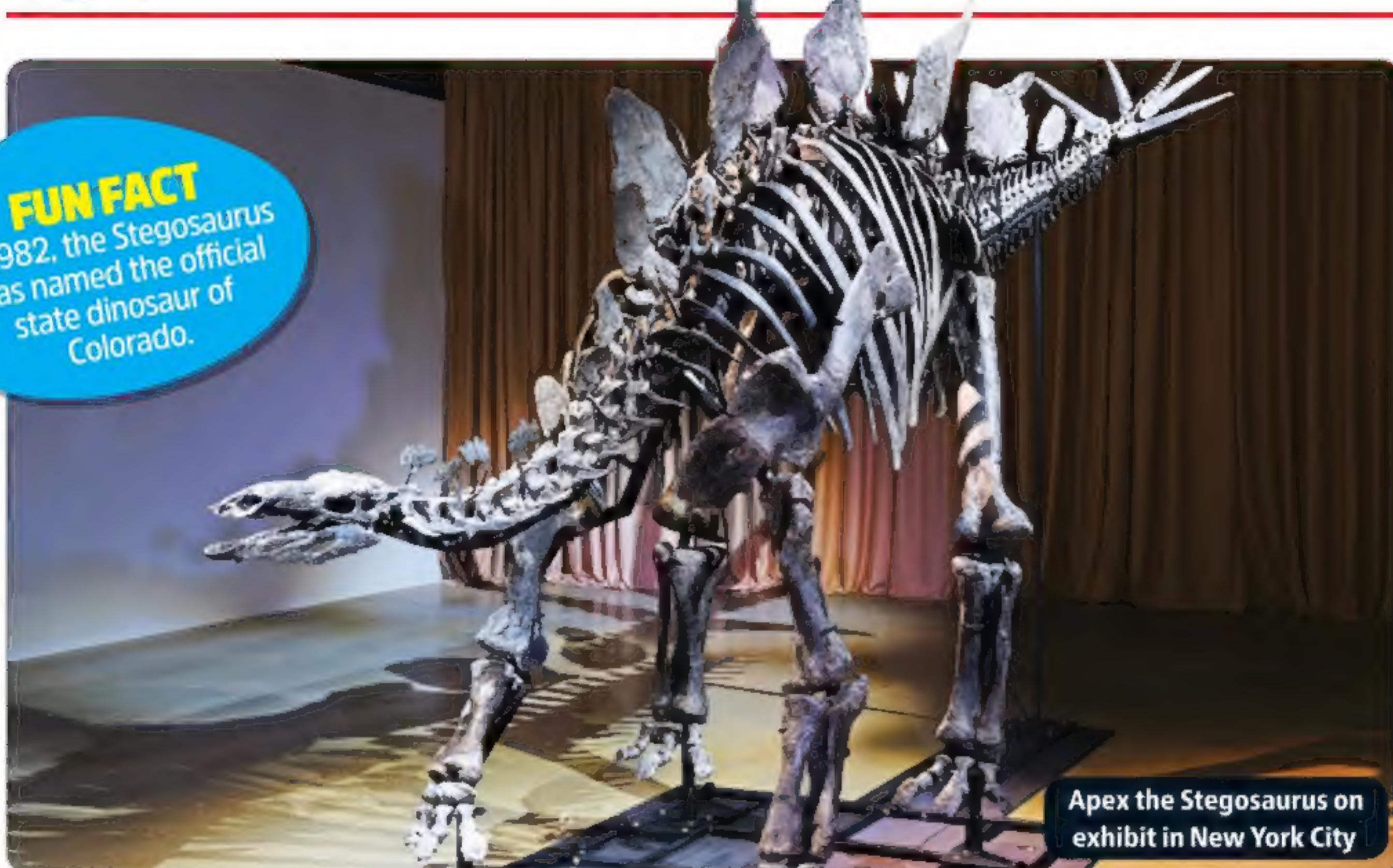


The couple



National news

FUN FACT
In 1982, the Stegosaurus was named the official state dinosaur of Colorado.



Apex the Stegosaurus on exhibit in New York City

About the AMNH



The American Museum of Natural History (above), established in 1869, is a global hub for the natural sciences, with a collection that includes more than 33 million specimens and cultural artifacts. The museum has 46 exhibition halls in 25 interconnected buildings and hosts about 4.5 million visitors each year.

Rare dinosaur fossil goes on view

The reassembled bones of a Stegosaurus named Apex went on display at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York City on December 5. Apex is the most complete specimen of a Stegosaurus ever assembled and the most expensive fossil ever sold at an auction.

How did the museum get Apex?

Apex is on loan to AMNH for four years from Kenneth C. Griffin. In July, Griffin, the leader of an investment firm, purchased Apex at an auction at Sotheby's in New York City for a record \$44.6 million. Some people were concerned that having Apex owned by an individual would prevent the public from viewing it and keep scientists from researching it. But Griffin said he would lend Apex to an institution so it could be seen and studied.

Why is Apex valuable?

The fossil includes about 80% of the dinosaur's 320 bones, which is many more than are contained in any of the approximately 80 other Stegosaurus remains available to scientific institutions worldwide. When Apex was alive 150 million years ago, roaming land that is now Colorado, the animal stood 11 feet tall and was 27 feet long. Scientists can tell from Apex's remains that it lived a long life, which is why they are excited to study them. Griffin's loan includes money to research Apex, which will involve creating 3D scans of the skull and skeleton and analyzing a sample taken from one of its thigh bones. Scientists hope to gain a better understanding of the species' metabolism and bone growth, among other insights.

How did people react?

"We are thrilled to have Apex on view at the museum and grateful to Ken Griffin for his commitment to sharing this magnificent specimen," AMNH president Sean M. Decatur said. Griffin said he is pleased to work with AMNH and happy that millions of people will have "the opportunity to see this epic dinosaur in person."

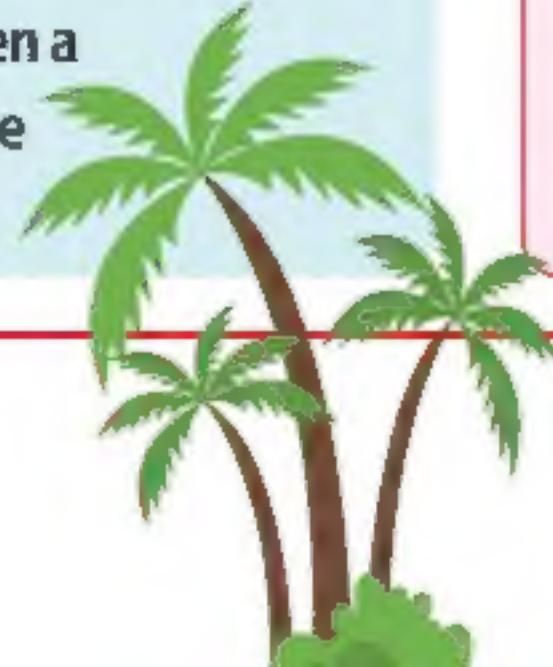
What will happen next?

Apex will remain on display near the entrance of the museum's Gilder Center until fall 2025. At that time, the fossil will be moved to the fourth floor, where the museum's fossil halls are located, for the rest of the loan period. The museum said it will also create a replica of Apex to go on display after Griffin's loan ends.

WORD OF THE WEEK

PALM

The word "palm" can mean a tropical tree or the inner surface of the hand. Both come from the same Latin word *palma*, related to *planus*, meaning "flat." In ancient Rome, a palm tree branch would be placed in the hands of the winner in a contest. Due to this and the resemblance between a palm leaf and a hand, the tree came to be called a palm.



THE WEEK IN HISTORY

December 20, 1946

It's a Wonderful Life makes premiere
On December 20, 1946, the film *It's a Wonderful Life* made its premiere in New York City. It takes place on Christmas Eve and stars James Stewart as George Bailey, a man who doesn't realize how much he has helped others. The movie received mixed reviews after its release but is now considered one of the best films of all time. In 1990, it was added to the National Film Registry due to its importance to US culture.



A scene from the movie

National news



The Artemis astronauts

NASA delays Artemis missions

The US space agency, NASA, said its Artemis mission to orbit four astronauts around the Moon will be pushed back from 2025 to 2026. The second Artemis mission to land astronauts on the Moon's South Pole was also rescheduled from 2026 to 2027. The delays were due to safety concerns related to the capsule's heat shield, which returned from a test flight with cracks. "We need to do it right," said Bill Nelson, the head of NASA.



Juan Soto

Record deal for baseball star

Major League Baseball player Juan Soto, age 26, has agreed to what is believed to be the biggest deal in sports history—a contract worth \$765 million to play for the New York Mets for 15 years. The outfielder, from the Dominican Republic, most recently played for the New York Yankees. He began his career with the Washington Nationals in 2018 and won a World Series title with the team in 2019.



The new color

Color of the year for 2025

Pantone, the color consulting company, revealed Mocha Mousse as its color of the year for 2025. It said the hue, a rich dusty brown, captures people's desire for comfort with the delicious qualities of chocolate and coffee. This is the first time in more than 20 years that a shade of brown has received the honor. Pantone's choice can influence fashion, design, and other trends in the year ahead.



Sabrina Carpenter



Morgan Wallen



Drake



Taylor Swift

POPULAR PLATFORM
Spotify has about 640 million users in more than 180 countries.

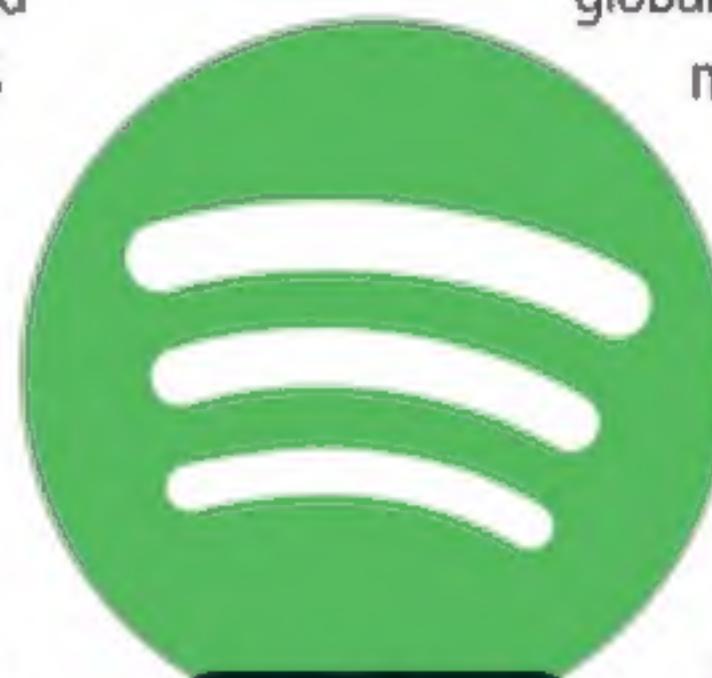
Spotify Wrapped music lists released

On December 4, Spotify, the world's largest music streaming service, released its 2024 Wrapped lists. Since 2016, Spotify has sent users their own personalized Wrapped lists, which summarize the songs and artists they have spent the most time listening to in the past year.

To compile the lists, Spotify counts every song a user has listened to for at least 30 seconds. Spotify also uses this data to create lists that reveal the most commonly streamed artists, albums, and songs in the US and around the world.

For the second year in a row, pop superstar Taylor Swift was the most streamed artist in the US and globally with more than 26.6 billion streams of her music. She had the most streamed album in the US and worldwide with *The Tortured Poets Department*. To honor Swift's achievement, Spotify added a special Wrapped badge to her artist profile.

The most-streamed song in the US and globally was Sabrina Carpenter's "Espresso." Released in April, the song surpassed 1.6 billion



Spotify's logo

streams and is featured on Carpenter's album *Short n' Sweet*, which was the third-most-streamed album in the US and worldwide.

Other artists who were recognized include rapper Drake, who was the second-most-streamed artist in the US and fourth globally. *One Thing at a Time*, from country star Morgan Wallen, was the second-most-streamed album in the US. Pop star Billie Eilish was the fifth-most-streamed artist globally. "Birds of a Feather" was the third most-streamed song worldwide and eighth in the US. It is part of Eilish's album *Hit Me Hard and Soft*, which was the second-most-streamed album globally and sixth in the US.

This year, Spotify introduced "Your Music Evolution," highlighting three distinct phases of a user's tastes. Each phase was based on the genres and artists a user chose and came with a custom playlist to match the mood.

Carpenter, who was one of the artists Spotify asked to record personal messages for fans who listened to their music, said, "Thanks for letting me spend so much time in your eardrums."

THE WEEK'S SILIEST HEADLINE

"Pennsylvania police pursue persistent pig pedestrian" UPI



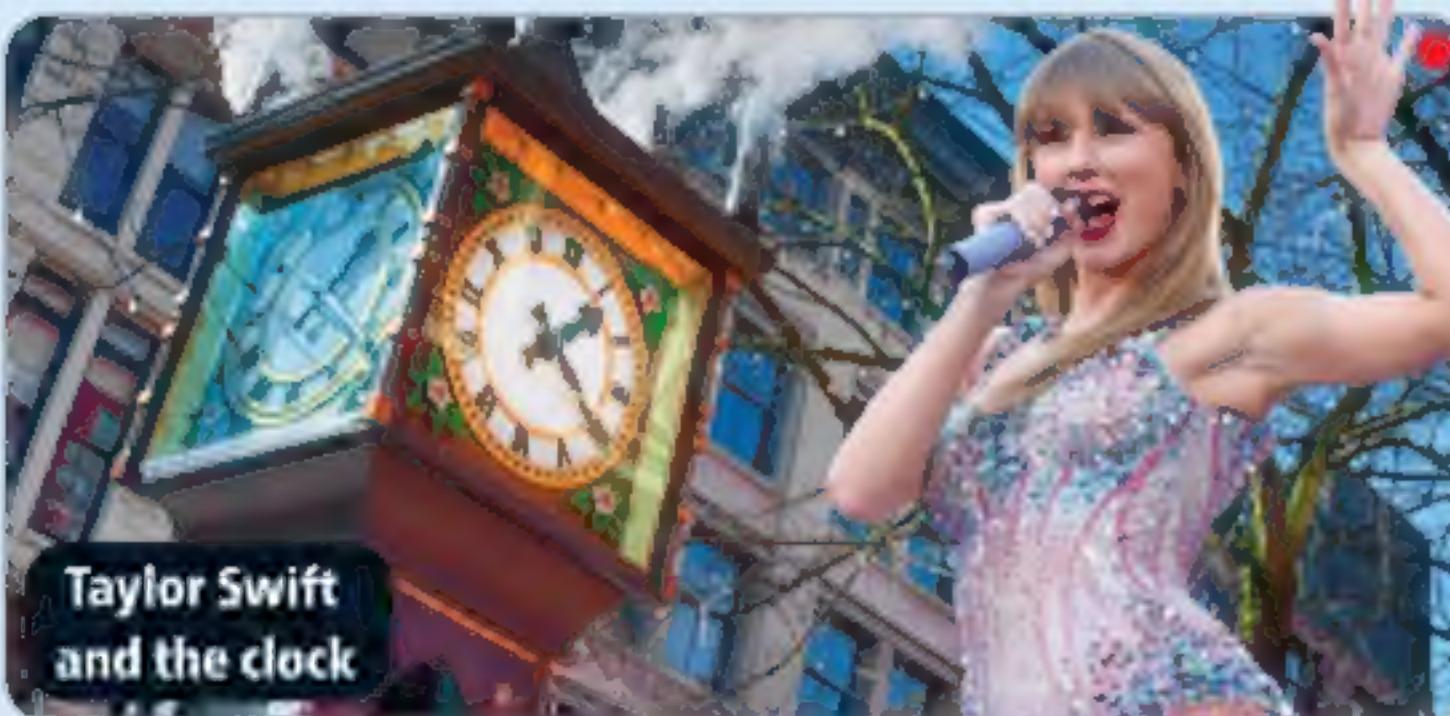


Around the world



London, United Kingdom Journalists go on strike

Employees of the world's oldest Sunday newspaper, *The Observer*, and its sister publication, *The Guardian*, walked out on December 4 for a 48-hour strike. They were protesting the sale of *The Observer* to a small digital media company, which they feared would put the paper's future at risk and reduce its readership by requiring people to pay to read articles online. Despite the strike, the sale was approved on December 6.



Vancouver, Canada Clock plays Taylor Swift tune

Between December 5 and 13, the Gastown Steam Clock in Vancouver was set to play "Shake It Off" by Taylor Swift to celebrate the singer visiting Vancouver for her Eras tour. The clock, built in 1977, has musical pipes powered by steam and usually plays a classic chime tune every 15 minutes. Swift's worldwide Eras tour, which sold more than \$2 billion in tickets over 149 shows, ended in Vancouver on December 8.



Venezuela Order to keep voting records

The United Nations (UN, an organization of 193 countries) has ordered Venezuela not to destroy voting records from July's presidential election. The UN is investigating claims that the election results were fraudulent. President Nicolás Maduro was named the winner of a third term in office, but authorities have not yet published the voting records to prove he won.

Paris, France Prime minister resigns

On December 5, French prime minister Michel Barnier resigned after he lost a no-confidence vote, which means the parliament (similar to Congress) did not want him to continue in the role. The vote was called after Barnier passed a budget without approval from lawmakers. He will remain in a limited role until a new government is appointed.



Windhoek, Namibia New president elected

On December 3, the final results of Namibia's presidential election were announced. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah was named the winner with 57% of the vote. She is set to become Namibia's first female president on March 21, 2025. Opposition parties claim that the election was not conducted fairly, however, and Nandi-Ndaitwah's main rival said he will challenge the result in court.



Around the world



A bull statue was found.

San Casciano dei Bagni, Italy Artifacts discovered at spa

Bronze statues, gold crowns, and jewels were among the items recently recovered at an ancient thermal spa in Italy. Archaeologists (scientists who study objects left long ago) have been digging at the site since 2019. The items have been preserved for centuries by the mud of the spa's warm springs, which were once used for healing purposes.



Afghan midwives in training

Kabul, Afghanistan

Women banned from medical careers

On December 3, Afghan women were told they can no longer train to become nurses or midwives (experts who assist with childbirth). Nursing and midwifery were some of the only jobs that the Taliban, a military and political group that controls the government, allowed women to do. Afghanistan already has a shortage of midwives, and in most areas male doctors are banned from treating women.



Yoon Suk Yeol

South Korea

Leader under investigation

South Korea's Ministry of Justice has banned President Yoon Suk Yeol from leaving the country while authorities investigate him for insurrection (rebellion). On December 3, Yoon declared martial law (military rule) and sent soldiers to seize the National Assembly. He said he had to "crush anti-state forces," but critics said he acted illegally. Lawmakers quickly voted to lift martial law, and protesters have called for Yoon to resign.



Gout Gout

Brisbane, Australia

Teen breaks sprint record

A 16-year-old sprinter has broken the Australian record for the fastest time to run 200 meters. At the All Schools Championships on December 7, Gout Gout ran the distance in 20.04 seconds. The previous record was set by Australian Olympic athlete Peter Norman in 1968 and hasn't been broken until now. Gout said, "I have been chasing that record, but I didn't think it would come this year."



The procession

Bangkok, Thailand

Ancient relic received

On December 4, more than 2,000 people joined a procession in the streets to welcome a Buddhist relic. The object, a tooth that reportedly belonged to the Buddha, was found in an old Chinese temple in 1955. China loaned it to Thailand to honor the birthday of the Thai king and celebrate 50 years of relations between the two countries. It will be displayed in Bangkok until February 14.



The big debate

Is it bad manners to regift a present?

It's nice to receive a gift. But if you're not going to use it, should you pass it on?

What you need to know

- Regifting is what it's called when you give a gift you received to another person or you donate it so someone else can use it.
- In 2024, people in the US are expected to spend an average of about \$1,063 on holiday gifts.
- Lizzie Post, who is an expert on manners, says that there is a right way and a wrong way to regift. She suggested rules such as do not regift a handmade item and only regift if the item is new.

There's an old saying about receiving a gift: It's the thought that counts. That means that even if you don't like or need what someone has given you, it's best to focus on the fact that they thought of you and took the time to find you a present. But after you've given your heartfelt thanks, what do you do with the gift itself? Maybe it's a book you've read or a sweater that just isn't your style. If you keep it, it will go to waste and take up space in your home. Some people think it's OK for you to pass the gift along to someone who will appreciate it, but others say that's rude. What do you think? Is it bad manners to regift a present?

YES Three reasons it is bad manners to regift a present

- Regifting makes it seem like you didn't care enough or take the proper time to choose a nice present for the recipient.
- It could be awkward if the person who originally gave it to you asks about it later.
- The gift is a nice reminder that someone cared about you. It's better to find a creative way to use it.



ANCIENT HISTORY

Historians say that thousands of years ago, early humans gave each other gifts like rocks, animal teeth, and tree bark.

Yes—kindness is more important

Regifting defeats the whole purpose of giving a present. When you regift, you're not putting thought or care into choosing something special, and the recipient can usually tell. That could hurt their feelings. And there's always a chance that the person who gave it to you in the first place will ask if you like it or want to see it. What will you do if you gave it away? If you tell the truth, you're being unkind. And if you don't, you'll have to lie, which is worse than keeping an unwanted gift around. A better solution would be to find a fun, creative way to use the gift, which will always remind you that someone cared enough to choose it for you.

No—make someone else's day

If it's truly the thought that counts with gifts, then it doesn't matter what happens to the item itself. It's still special, whether it stays in the back of your closet or gets rewound and given to someone else. Just because you don't want or need whatever you received doesn't mean it's not valuable. It could be really great for another person, like a friend, family member, or child who wouldn't otherwise receive a present. When you regift something, you're doing two good things: making someone else happy and preventing waste. There's already enough waste in this world. The gift can still bring joy—to someone else.

NO Three reasons it is not bad manners to regift a present

- The thought that goes into a gift remains, regardless of where the present ends up.
- One person's so-so gift is another person's treasure. You'll make someone else happy when you give it to them.
- It's much worse to let something useful go to waste. Regifting is an excellent way to prevent that from happening.

LAST WEEK'S POLL

Last week, we asked if schools should still have snow days. In a nearly unanimous vote, you let us know how much you want those special days to continue.



What do you think?

Now that you've read a bit more about this issue, visit kids.theweekjunior.com/polls so you can vote in our debate. Vote **YES** if you think it is bad manners to regift a present or **NO** if you don't. We'll publish the results in issue 247.

The goal of the big debate is to present two sides of an issue fairly in order to stimulate discussion and allow our readers to make up their minds. The views on this page do not reflect those of *The Week Junior*, and the page is not funded by third parties.



Relating to her role

Marissa Bode drew on her own experience to play Nessarose in *Wicked*.

The movie adaptation of the Broadway musical *Wicked* has been making history at the box office since it premiered in November. One of its cast members is making history too. Marissa Bode, who plays Nessarose, a character who uses a wheelchair, is the first actress to play the part who also uses a wheelchair in real life.

Bode, age 24, grew up in the small town of Mazomanie, Wisconsin. Her love of acting began at age 8 when she joined her local community theater group. She first saw *Wicked* at age 11, around the time she survived a car accident that left her paralyzed from the waist down. She continued acting, and in 2021 she earned a degree from the American Musical and Dramatic Academy in Los Angeles, California. A year later, she auditioned and

got the part of Nessarose in the film version of *Wicked*, which is based on characters from the book *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. Nessarose is a student at Shiz University and the younger sister of Elphaba, the future Wicked Witch of the West.

When Bode was a child, she was excited to see a character in a wheelchair in *Wicked*. She told *The Week Junior* that playing Nessarose as an adult helped her connect with the character beyond the shared experience of using a wheelchair, particularly the idea of "wanting independence." Through this role, Bode hopes to inspire audiences to approach others with empathy and spark meaningful conversations about inclusion and representation. "When you try to understand one another, that's where less conflict and more love comes in," Bode said.



In *Wicked*



**SAVE
THE DATE**

The second part of the *Wicked* film will be released on November 21, 2025.

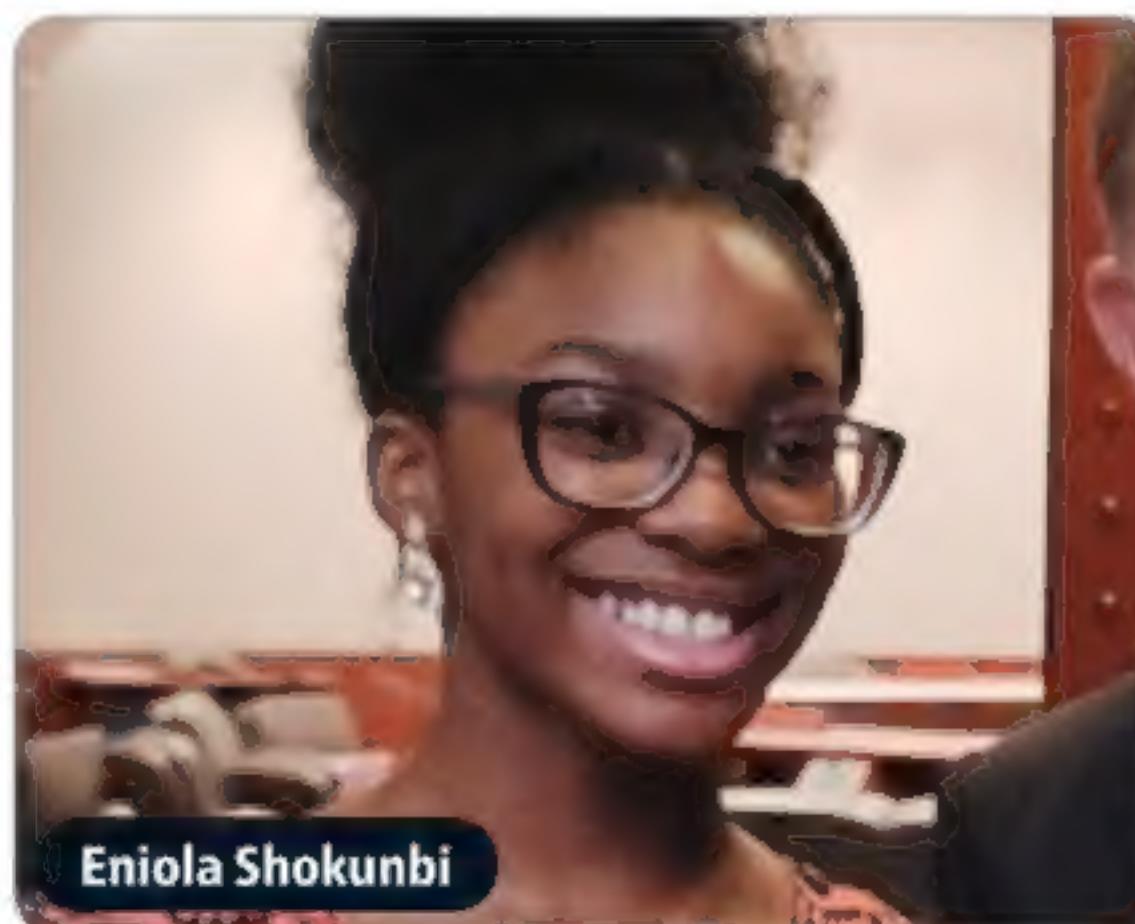
Marissa Bode

Adding art to sports

When college football teams want custom artwork on their helmets, they call airbrush artist Armando Villarreal. His designs have honored players, for example, or re-created the look of leather helmets from the early 1900s (below). An army veteran from Nebraska, Villarreal honed his airbrushing skills on motorcycles. His big break came in 2018 when he was hired to design a helmet for Mississippi State University. Since then, he has created hundreds of helmets for football programs across the US.



Armando Villarreal



Eniola Shokunbi

A young innovator

At age 11, Eniola Shokunbi of Middletown, Connecticut, is leading an \$11.5 million initiative to improve air quality in schools. For a fifth grade project, she and her classmates, with help from University of Connecticut scientists, developed a low-cost air filtration system. After the filter was tested with the Environmental Protection Agency, it was shown to remove 99% of viruses. Shokunbi secured state funding to install the filters in schools across Connecticut. She hopes to expand the program nationwide so kids can go to school "knowing they're safe, healthy, and able to learn."

OVERHEARD



"Try your hardest—and with that mindset more than anything, I've been able to achieve what I have in dance."

Olympic gymnast Stephen Nedoroscik, age 26, on the lessons he learned as a contestant on the recent season of *Dancing with the Stars*, where he finished in fourth place



Animals and the environment



Alone time helps aging red deer stay healthy.

DID YOU KNOW?
A glass sponge found living in the deep ocean in 2012 was believed to be 11,000 years old.

Animals with long lives

"Old" has a different meaning for some animals. The oldest known living land animal is Jonathan the giant tortoise, who is 192 years old. Greenland sharks have an estimated life span of 270 to 500 years. They live in the North Atlantic and Arctic Oceans, and scientists think the cold water slows down their body processes.



Jonathan

Older animals are less social

Several groups of researchers recently studied how getting older affects the behavior of a wide variety of animals. Their findings, published in a special issue of the scientific journal *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, show that in many species, animals tend to spend less time socializing with others as they age—and this shift has some surprising benefits.

As with humans, social relationships are an essential part of most animals' lives. Living and working alongside others helps animals find food and mates and stay safe from predators. In fact, one of the studies found that the more social a

species is, the longer that species is likely to live and the more offspring it is likely to produce.

However, animals also have good reasons for becoming less social as they get older, a trend known as social aging. One of the studies focused on wild red deer on the Scottish island of Rum. It found that limiting social interaction reduces an older deer's risk of getting infected by harmful parasites (organisms that live in or on other living things and get nourishment from them), which the deer become more vulnerable to as they age. Another study found that social aging lowers rhesus macaques' risk of catching a disease.



A rhesus macaque

One study in the journal tracked house sparrows on a remote English island and found that older sparrows have fewer social relationships. Older birds may not need the connections as much as younger sparrows, which have to find mates and learn survival skills from other birds. A study on chacma baboons also suggests that social aging could be a way to save energy. Older baboons move around less and don't groom each other as much, which seems to be a tiring social activity.

It is helpful to study aging in animals because scientists can track how their behavior changes over their entire life span, which could also shed light on how human societies will change as they get older. "Animal populations are a great way of considering the fundamental rules of how aging may shape societies," said journal editor Josh Firth.



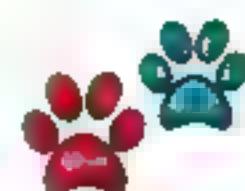
PLACE OF THE WEEK

Torres del Paine National Park, Chile

Located in the Patagonia region of South America, Torres del Paine National Park is a popular destination for hikers, adventurers, and nature lovers. Its spectacular landscapes include mountains, lakes, glaciers, rivers, shrubs, grasslands, and forests. At its center stand the "towers" that gave the park its name—three jagged granite peaks more than 8,200 feet tall. Visitors might see pumas, foxes, huemul deer, and guanacos, a relative of llamas. Birdwatchers can look out for Chilean flamingos, Magellanic woodpeckers, rheas, swans, and Andean condors, the largest bird of prey in the world.



A guanaco



The new tiny species

Miniature frog species discovered

A frog smaller than some ants has been discovered in the Atlantic Forest in Brazil. At 0.27 inches long, it is the second-smallest known vertebrate (animal with a backbone) in the world.

Scientists from the University of Campinas in Brazil identified the frog after they heard an unknown sound in audio recordings from the forest. Tests confirmed that it came from a new species—the seventh known type of flea toad, a group of miniature frogs that are smaller than a fingernail. (Despite the name, these creatures are not toads.) They named it

Brachycephalus dacnis after Project Dacnis, a nonprofit organization that works to conserve the forest.

Further study revealed that *B. dacnis*' head is structured like that of a regular-sized frog, but it lacks some fingers and parts of its inner ears, like other miniature frogs. As a flea toad, its eggs develop directly into frogs rather than tadpoles.

Learning about this species will help experts protect the frog and others like it. "There are untold numbers of unknown tiny frogs out there," amphibian expert Mark Scherz told *The New York Times*.

Animal of the Week

African giant pouched rat



African giant pouched rats are being trained to sniff out illegal items at ports in Africa. The world's largest rats are very intelligent and could help stop wildlife smuggling by identifying items such as pangolin scales and elephant tusks.

LIFE SPAN: Up to 9 years in the wild

HABITAT: Mostly holes and hollow trees in Africa

SIZE: Up to 9 pounds, 20 to 35 inches

DIET: Insects, snails, nuts, seeds, and fruit

FUN FACT: These rats got their name because they collect food in their cheek pouches.



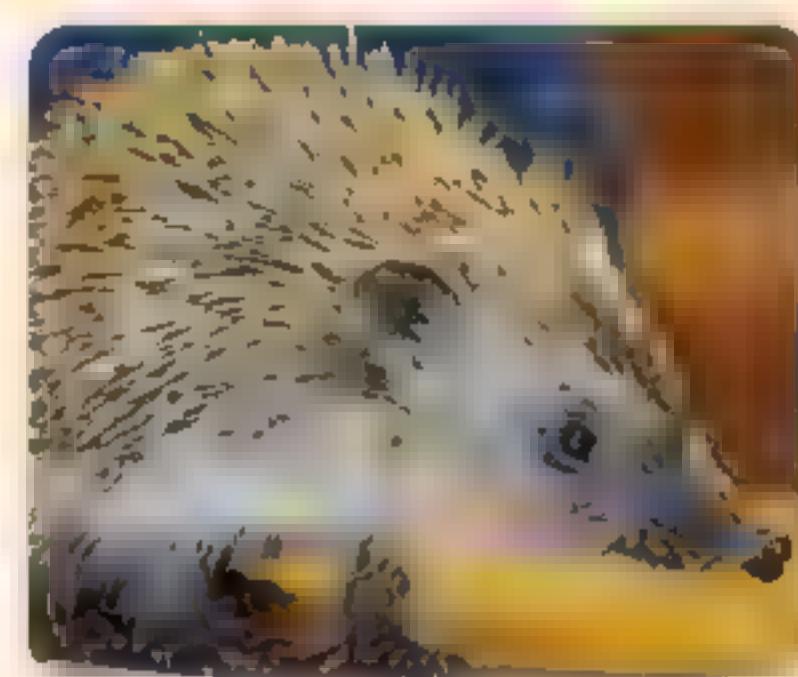
Good week



Palm trees

Hawaii's agriculture board approved new rules to protect palm trees against coconut rhinoceros beetles. Authorities are working to stop the spread of these large, non-native beetles, which attack coconut palms and other plants.

Bad week



Hedgehogs

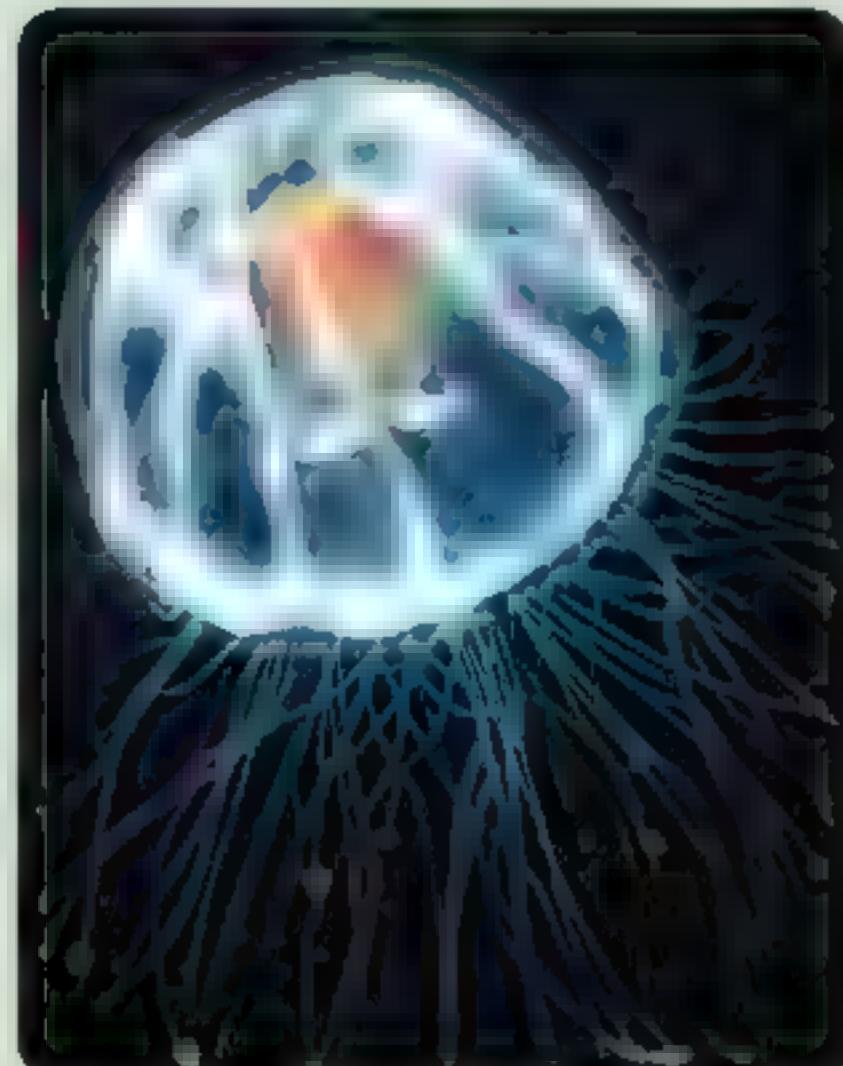
The International Union for Conservation of Nature changed the status of the European hedgehog from least concern to near threatened on its Red List, which tracks extinction risk. The population has declined mainly due to habitat loss.



Kelly Sutherland

Associate professor, Oregon Institute of Marine Biology

Most mature jellyfish live for weeks or months (or a few years in an aquarium). One species, the "immortal jellyfish," can extend its life—possibly forever—by transforming from the mature "medusa" stage of its life cycle back into the "polyp" stage, which is attached to the seafloor.



"Are jellyfish actually able to live forever?"

Sarah, 11, California

Do you have a question for an animal expert? Send it to hello@theweekjunior.com. Find out more about Dr. Sutherland's research at sutherlandlab.org.



WORD ORIGIN

Carbohydrates get their name from the elements they contain: carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen.

The flour used in bread has carbohydrates.

Why humans love starchy foods

Starchy foods like bread, noodles, pasta, potatoes, and rice are popular all over the world. Starch is a type of carbohydrate, one of the main nutrients in food (see box at right) and an important part of the human diet. Now a study has revealed that humans' love for these foods can be traced back more than 800,000 years—to the DNA (a chemical that carries information about a person's body and characteristics) of our ancestors.

In the study, researchers analyzed the genomes of 68 ancient humans, including one that lived 45,000 years ago. A genome is a complete set of DNA. The researchers focused on a specific gene (segment of DNA) called AMY1.

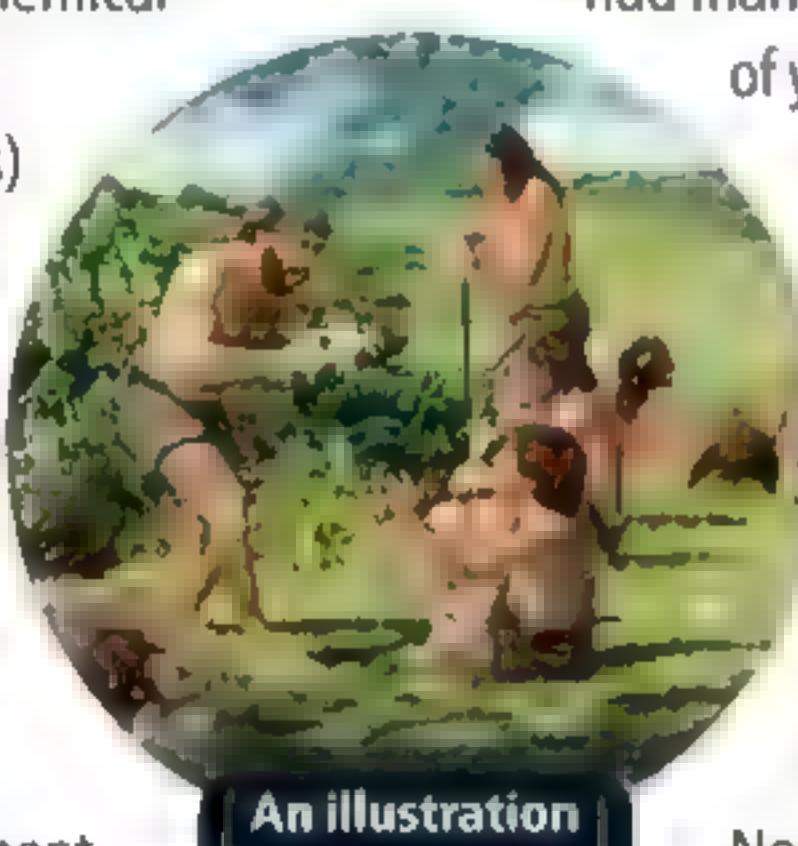
AMY1 produces a substance called amylase, which helps humans break down starch in foods. Humans are able to produce multiple copies of the AMY1 gene, but the number of copies people have varies from person to person. The more copies people have, the better their ability to break down carbohydrates.

The first crops grown by humans, about 12,000 years ago, included chickpeas, lentils,

and wheat, which are all starchy. For many years, scientists have believed that before humans started growing their food, they mainly ate meat from animals they hunted. They also believed that AMY1 started increasing in people sometime after they started farming.

However, the team found that humans had many copies of AMY1 thousands of years ago, long before they started growing crops. In fact, Neanderthals and Denisovans, both early relatives of modern humans, also had copies of AMY1. This made researchers suspect that the gene dates back more than 800,000 years—that's before Neanderthals, Denisovans, and homo sapiens (today's humans) evolved into separate species.

Kwondo Kim, one of the study's authors, said AMY1 became very useful when humans did start farming foods like chickpeas and wheat. Given that the gene emerged so early in our history, however, the researchers suspect it may have other benefits. It may allow humans to extract more energy from carbohydrates, for example.



An illustration of Neanderthals

What are carbohydrates?



Beans and whole grains

Carbohydrates, which are also known as carbs, are one of the three main nutrients in food, along with proteins and fats. They are important to our diets because they get converted into energy in our bodies. There are two different kinds of carbs: simple carbohydrates and complex carbohydrates. They come in three forms: sugar, starch, and fiber. Some foods contain all three.

Sugars are simple carbohydrates because the body breaks them down quickly. Starch and fiber are complex carbs because they take longer to process. Starch has to be broken down into sugar before it can become energy. Fiber is not broken down but helps the body digest other things. Complex carbs include whole grains, such as oats and beans.



Ancient city found under Mexico jungle

A team of researchers has discovered evidence of an ancient lost city in Mexico, hidden in a dense jungle. They named the city Valeriana.

The scientists made the discovery while analyzing data collected using light detection and ranging (LiDAR) technology. LiDAR fires laser pulses at the ground from a plane, then measures how long it takes for the laser to bounce back.

The time varies based on what objects the laser hits. The data lets scientists "see" and create a 3D map.

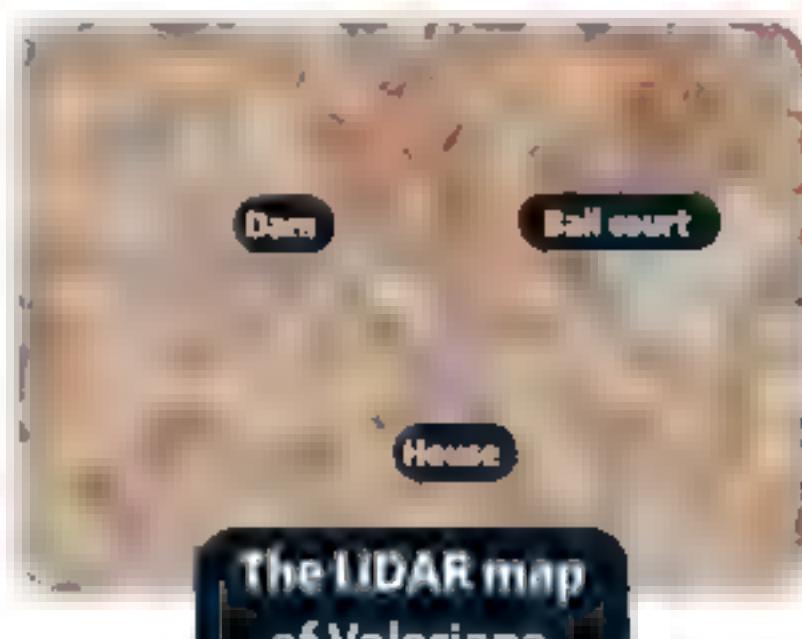
The LiDAR data revealed that under the thick tree cover of the jungle in Campeche, Mexico, there was once a Maya city. The Maya are an Indigenous people (first people known to inhabit a

place) who have lived in Mexico and Central America for about 4,000 years. Ancient Maya civilization was very sophisticated and advanced.

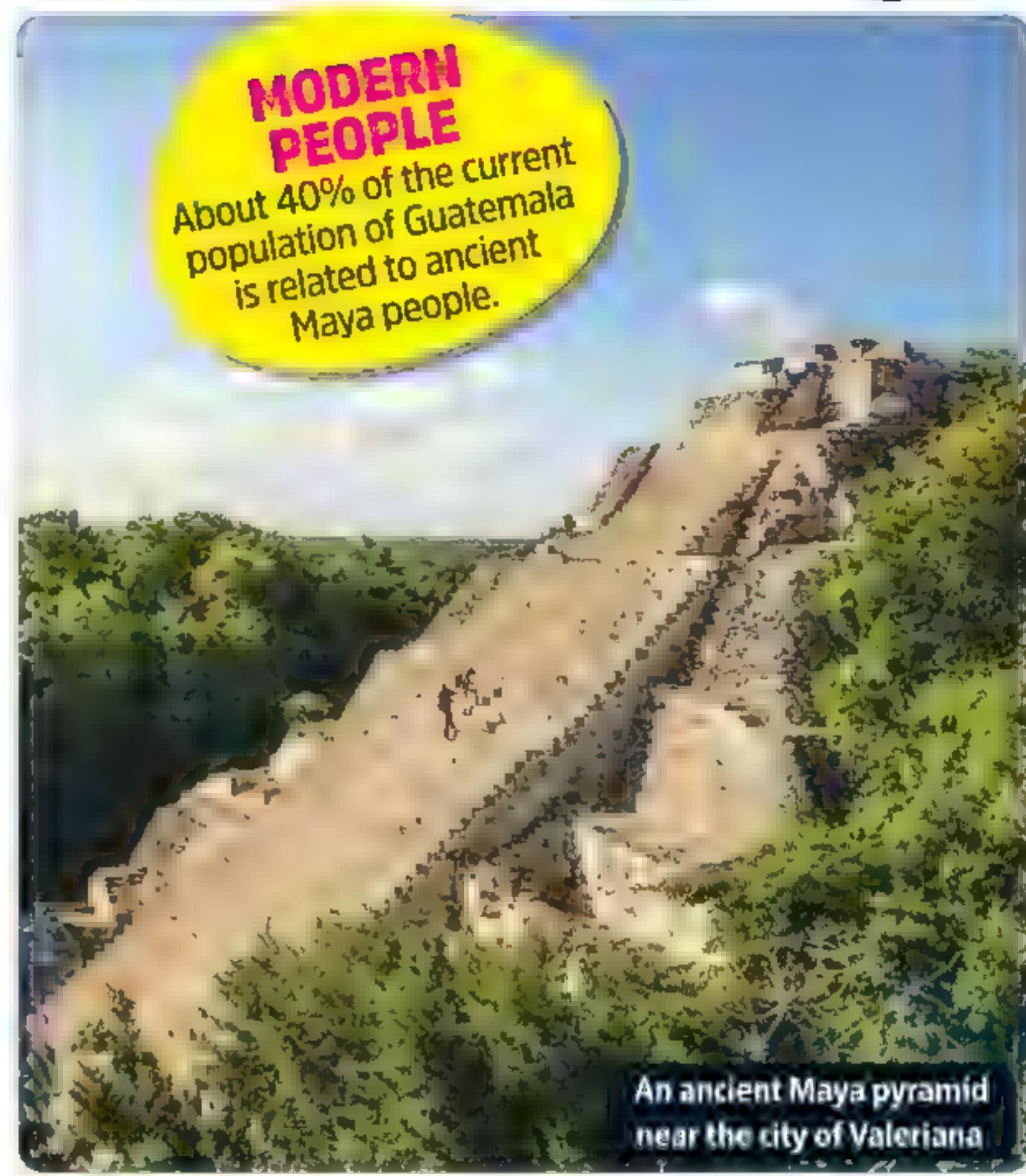
The researchers believe Valeriana was founded before the year 150. It has been covered by jungle, which is why it hadn't been spotted before. Like other ancient Maya cities, it had pyramids, a reservoir, and a ball court where a game

called pitz was played. The city also had amphitheaters, which are open-air venues for performances.

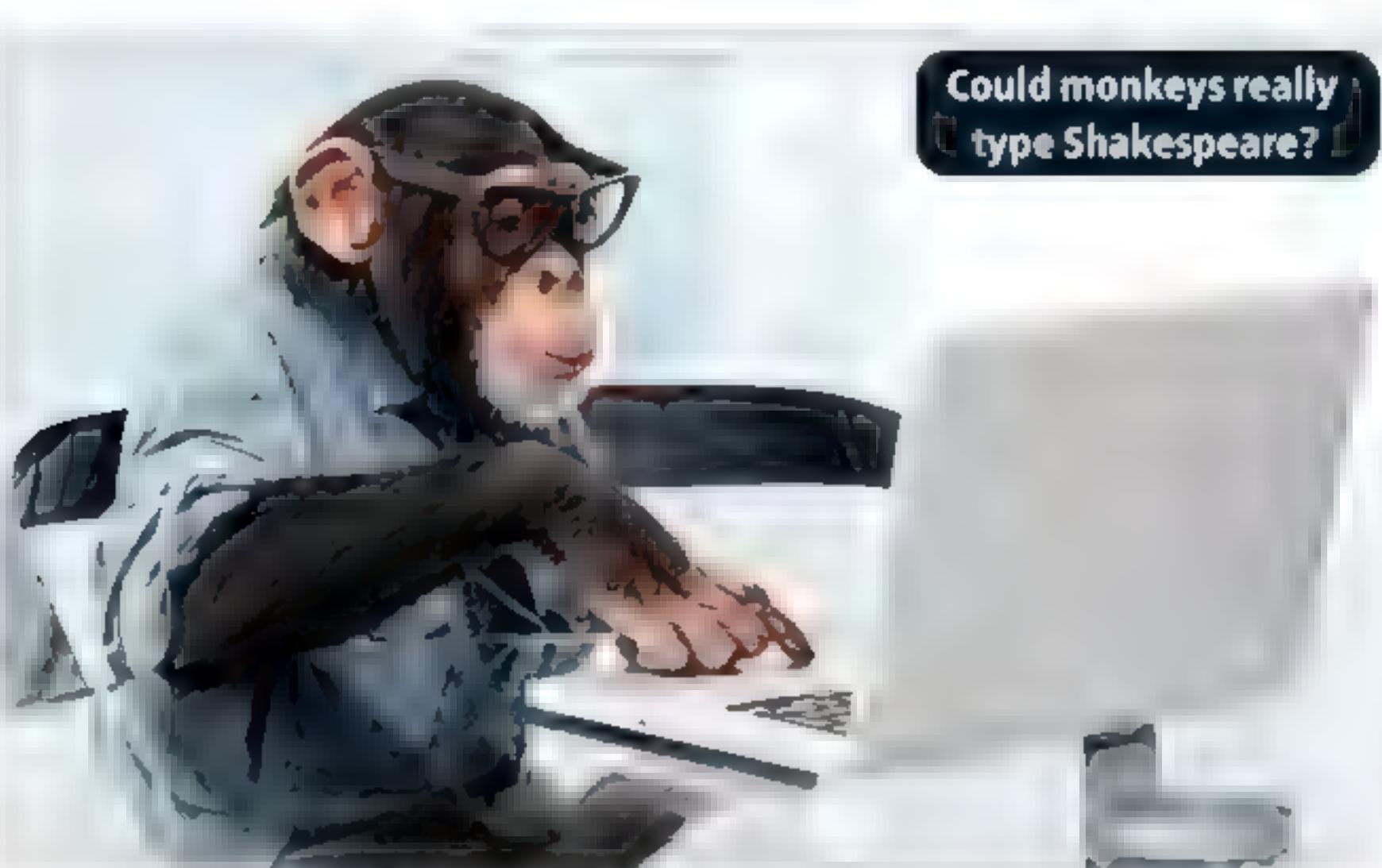
Luke Auld-Thomas, one of the researchers, said other historical sites are most likely hiding in the jungle. "There are more of them than we can ever hope to study," Auld-Thomas said.



The LiDAR map of Valeriana



An ancient Maya pyramid near the city of Valenciana



Could monkeys really type Shakespeare?

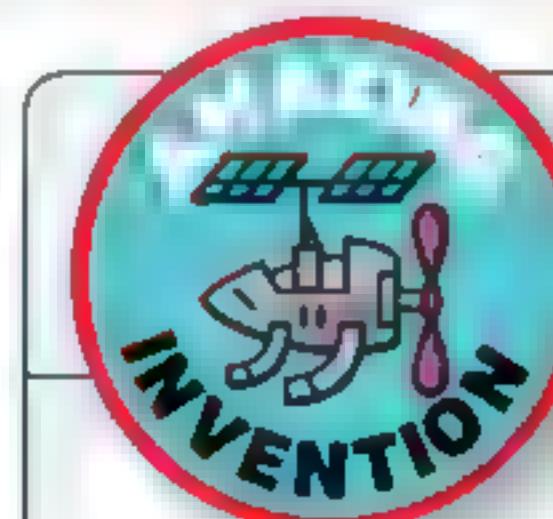
Theory of typing monkeys tested

Many years ago, the "infinite monkey theorem" proposed that an infinite number of monkeys randomly typing on a keyboard—or one monkey with an infinite amount of time—would eventually tap out the works of William Shakespeare. It was intended as a way of thinking about randomness and chance. In a new study, mathematicians in Australia found that it won't happen.

For their calculations, the team used the current number of

chimpanzees on Earth, which is about 200,000, and their average life span of 30 years. They estimated that the chimps could hit one key per second and that the universe would end in about a googol (the number 1 followed by 100 zeros) of years.

The team calculated that even if every chimp typed until the universe ended, they wouldn't type any Shakespeare. In fact, a chimp would have only a 5% chance of typing the word "bananas" in its lifetime.



A robot that lets kids learn to code



The Sphero Bolt +

A little round robot can help kids learn to code. Using an app, young coders can program the Sphero Bolt + to roll, spin, race, and follow a maze. It can be made to play sounds, like animal noises, and light up in different colors, patterns, and levels of brightness.

The Sphero Bolt + is good for coders of all experience levels, whether they're just beginning or have advanced skills. It includes multiple sensors and motors, as well as a bright LED display. The robot is made of sturdy plastic that's nearly indestructible.



Winter Cover Contest

Amazing artwork!

For our 5th annual Winter Cover Contest, we invited readers to create a cover of the magazine that celebrates the season and the spirit of *The Week Junior*. We received more than 2,000 submissions (the most ever!) and were impressed by the creativity that went into all of them.

The contest was judged by Editor-in-Chief Andrea Barbalich, Creative Director Dean Abatemarco, and award-winning children's book creators Johnnie Christmas, Chanel Miller, and Brian Selznick. Christmas is a best-selling comic book creator and illustrator who has written several graphic novels, including his latest release, *Gamerville*. Miller is a best-selling author of adult books who recently published her first novel for young

people, titled *Magnolia Wu Unfolds It All*. Selznick, a Caldecott Medal winner, is the best-selling author and illustrator of more than 10 middle-grade books. We thank our esteemed judges for sharing their time and expertise!

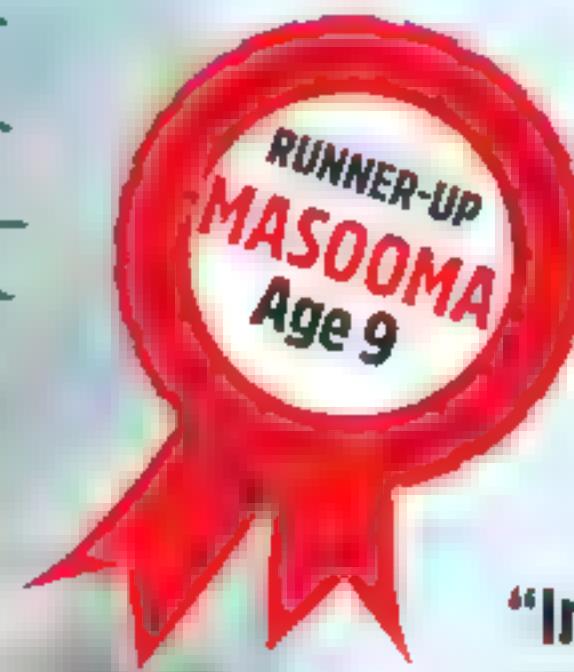
It was extremely difficult to narrow down the entries to the 10 finalists shown on these four pages. In the end, it was Josie's entry, "Penguin Love," that earned the grand prize for her drawing of two affectionate penguins with a beautiful sky and cityscape behind them.

Congratulations to Josie, runners-up Masooma and Anavi, the finalists, and every artist who entered. "Everyone should be really proud of themselves," Selznick said. "I hope they feel encouraged to keep making beautiful things."

"I was drawn to the quality of the drawing and the sweet sentiment. The colors are beautiful, and I love the way the penguins pop against the soft pastel background. To me, this drawing is about friendship, which is something *The Week Junior* celebrates."

—Creative Director
Dean Abatemarco





"Imagine looking out your window and seeing this sloth with a lavender beanie! It would definitely make my day. The fluffy cotton is a wonderful bonus, and I enjoy seeing the organic strokes of paint. The sloth's expression is irresistible!" —Author and illustrator Chanel Miller



"The snow falling, the chimney smoke rising, and the vibrant golden cup are immediately attention-grabbing. The green trees, a zigzagging footpath, and a snowman finalize the aesthetic appeal of this eye-catching work of art. If I could live inside a drawing, it would be this one!"

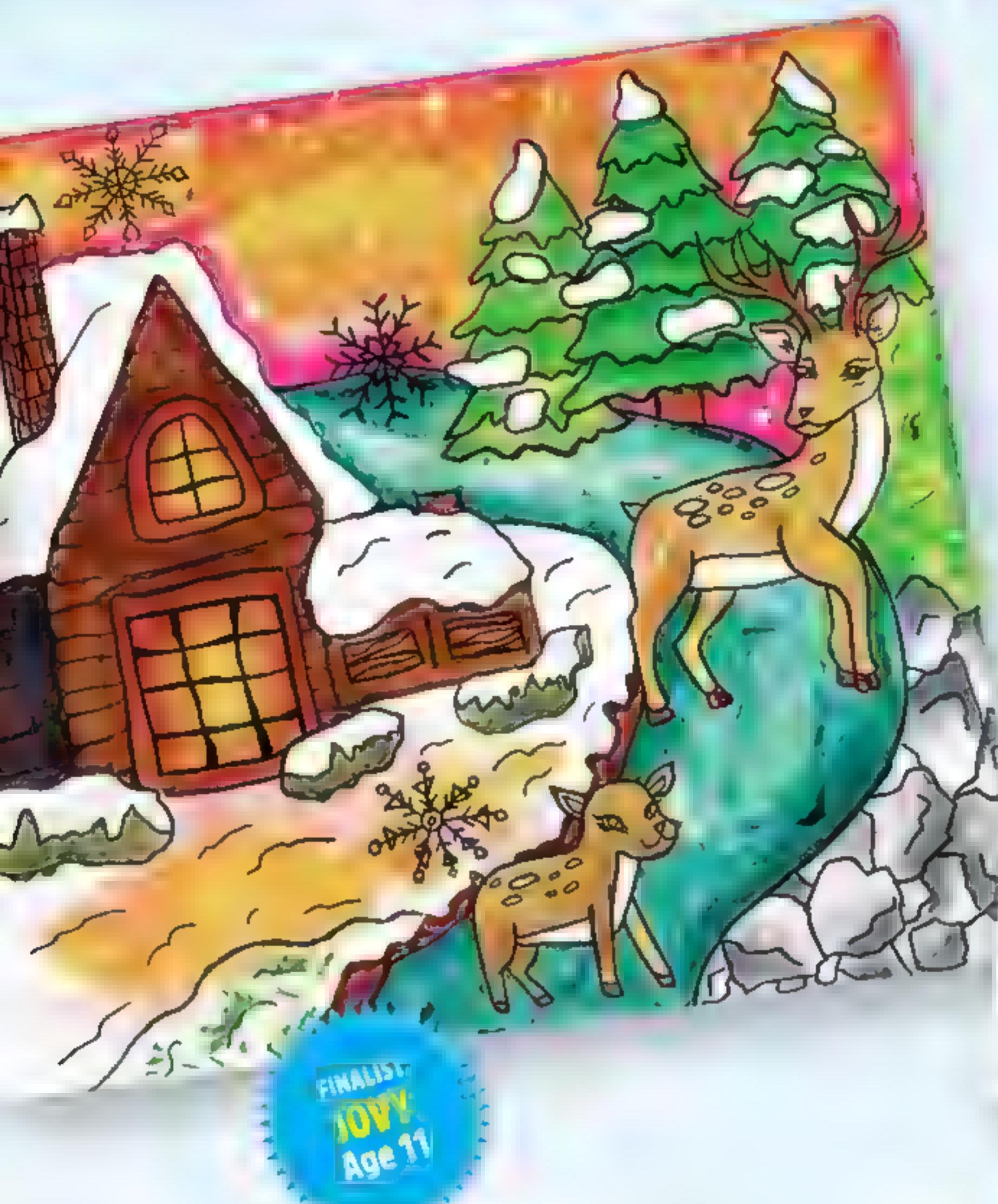
—Author and illustrator
Johnnie Christmas



Winter Cover Contest



Winter Cover Contest





Sports



Soccer trophy facts



The team that wins the MLS Cup is given the Philip F. Anschutz Trophy (above). It is named for a business executive who is a founding owner of the LA Galaxy. The sterling silver cup is two feet high and weighs 43 pounds. A replica is made for each champion's stadium.

LA Galaxy are MLS champs

On December 7, the MLS Cup final, Major League Soccer's championship match, was played between the LA Galaxy and the New York Red Bulls. The Galaxy hosted the competition at their home field, Dignity Health Sports Park in Carson, California, where they had not been beaten all season. They continued the streak with a 2-1 victory over the Red Bulls and claimed their sixth MLS Cup title, the most of any team in the league.

Making it to the final was a big accomplishment for both teams, which are two of the original MLS franchises. In 2023, the Galaxy had one of their worst seasons, but this year they finished the regular season in second place in the

Western Conference. They dominated their competition during most of their postseason action. However, they lost their star midfielder, Riqui Puig, to a season-ending knee injury during their conference final.

The Red Bulls, who have never won an MLS Cup, ended the regular season in seventh place in the Eastern Conference. They began the playoffs by knocking out the reigning champions, the Columbus Crew. This was the Red Bulls' first time in the final since 2008.

The championship match got off to a fast start. In the ninth minute, the Galaxy's Joseph Paintsil opened the scoring after receiving a tremendous pass from Gaston Brugman, who filled in as a



Gaston Brugman

starter for Puig. Red Bulls goalkeeper Carlos Coronel deflected Paintsil's shot, but he was unable to keep it out of the net. Four minutes later, Dejan Joveljic doubled the Galaxy's lead.

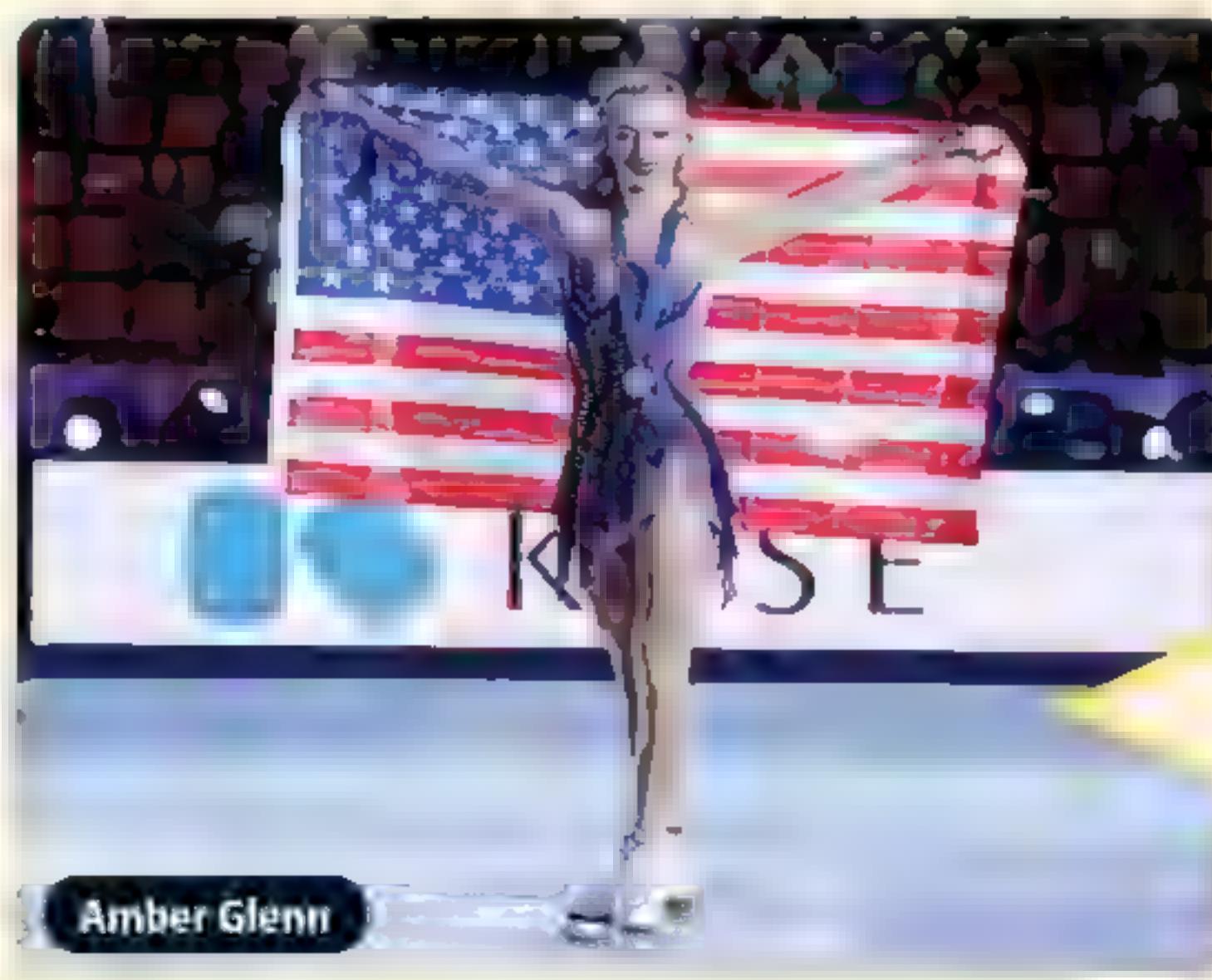
In the 28th minute, New York's Sean Nealis was able to score following a corner kick. Noah Eile of the Red Bulls came close to tying the game five minutes later, but Galaxy goalkeeper John McCarthy made the save. Late in the second half, the Red Bulls continued to create scoring chances, but they were unable to find an equalizing goal.

After the game, Brugman was named the Most Valuable Player of the championship. As winners of the MLS Cup, he and the Galaxy have earned a spot in next season's Concacaf Champions Cup, a tournament for the top clubs from North America, Central America, and the Caribbean.

THIS WEEK'S WINNERS

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

In the Southeastern Conference (SEC) football championship game on December 7, the University of Georgia beat the University of Texas, 22-19, in overtime to earn the number two seed (ranking) in the College Football Playoff. In the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC) championship game, Clemson University beat Southern Methodist University, 34-31, with a walk-off 56-yard field goal.



Amber Glenn

COLLEGE SOCCER

The University of North Carolina (UNC) beat Wake Forest, 1-0, in the final of the NCAA Women's College Cup on December 9. UNC now has 23 national titles for women's soccer.

FIGURE SKATING

On December 7, Amber Glenn of the US became the first American since 2010 to win the women's singles title at the Grand Prix Final, a top skating event. US skaters also placed first in men's singles and ice dance.

Sports



STATE
SPIRIT



Carla Leite



Kate Martin



Temi Fagbenle

New WNBA team drafts players

The Golden State Valkyries—a new WNBA (Women's National Basketball Association) team that will represent California's Bay Area and begin playing in 2025—is starting to fill its roster. On December 6, the league held an expansion draft in which the team acquired players from existing WNBA teams. The last time the WNBA held an expansion draft was in 2008, when the Atlanta Dream entered the league.

In the draft, the Valkyries were allowed to select one player from each of the league's 12 teams. However, each team could protect up to six players who could not be drafted. The Valkyries selected 11 players, including Kayla Thornton of the New York Liberty, the current WNBA champions, and Kate Martin, who just finished a strong rookie season with the Las Vegas Aces.

Seven of the new Valkyries are from outside the US, including Carla Leite, a 20-year-old from France who was on the Dallas Wings, and veteran center Temi Fagbenle, who is from the UK and spent last season with the Indiana Fever. The Valkyries can add more players during the free agency period, which begins in February. They will also have the fifth, 17th, and 30th picks in the 2025 WNBA Draft.

The WNBA will hold another expansion draft ahead of the 2026 season to fill the rosters for teams coming to Portland, Oregon, and Toronto, Canada. On December 5, the league announced that the Toronto team—the first non-US team in the league—will be called the Toronto Tempo.

The Valkyries will play their first game on May 16. They will host the Los Angeles Sparks at the Chase Center in San Francisco, California.

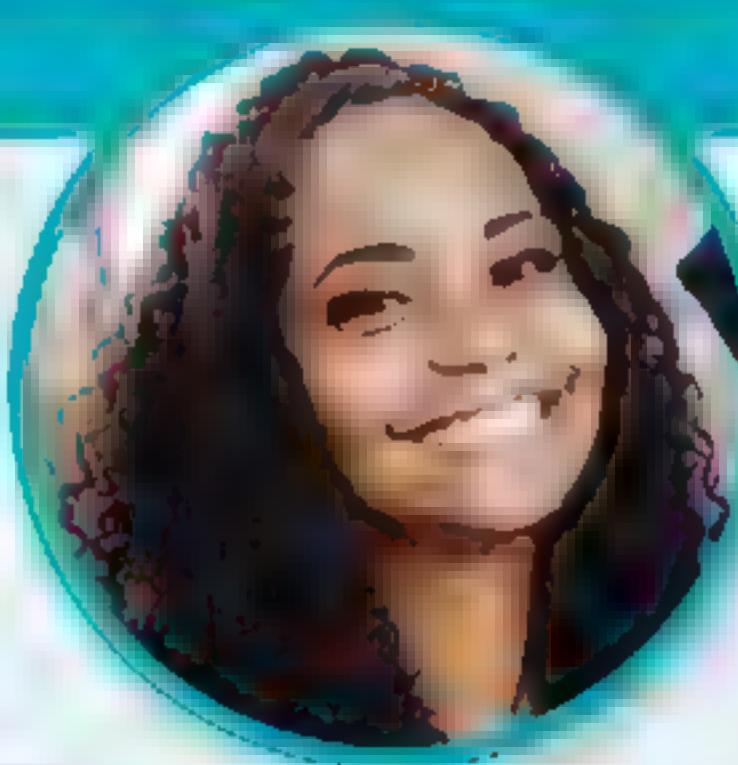


COACH OF THE WEEK

Coach's Name: **Liz McLean**

Organization: **Gainesville Basketball Association**

"Coach Liz is an awesome coach and deserves this after all her hard work and dedication! She has encouraged more and more girls in our community to play sports. She has done many free clinics for girls to learn basketball. This year, Coach Liz has doubled the size of the basketball program in our community! She is so fun and encouraging, and it makes me love basketball so much more!" Sylvie, 9, Virginia



To nominate a Coach of the Week, send your coach's name, photo, sport, and team to hello@theweekjunior.com. Include your name, age, state, and a few reasons why your coach is great.

SPOTLIGHT ON...



Tiago Behar

AGE: 22 SPORT: SWIMMING

TEAMS: ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

SWISS NATIONAL TEAM

Diving in My parents were swimmers and put me in the pool before I was 2. I did other sports, but eventually I decided I liked swimming the most. I was much faster than the other kids in my group at backstroke, and I really enjoyed that feeling.

Major move My family lived in Switzerland, so coming to Arizona was a big change, especially with team dynamics. Here, it's a positive atmosphere all the time. At home, people were there to do the work but not necessarily to have as much fun.



Chill time My favorite thing about swimming is how it allows me to clear my mind, especially when I have a lot of schoolwork or an exam coming up.

Going for gold My dad swam for UCLA in college, then just missed out on qualifying for the Olympics. That created a passion in me to try to qualify for the Olympics. I did, and I swam for Switzerland at the Paris Games in the 4 x 200-meter freestyle relay. Overall, the swim was not bad, but there were many mistakes I probably shouldn't have made. If I keep swimming for three more years, maybe I'll try to qualify for the next Olympics.

Key to success Our team has a quote we say quite a bit: "How you do anything is how you do everything." I try to apply the same effort that I put into my swimming into my schoolwork or anything else. It leads to pretty good results most of the time.

Wise words Chasing a difficult goal that you might fail at can be extremely rewarding, regardless of whether you achieve the goal or not.



WOW!



Taka (left) and Mufasa in *Mufasa: The Lion King*

Mufasa coming to theaters

A new film tells the story of how a legendary character from Disney's *The Lion King* rose to power.

Fans of *The Lion King* are getting ready for a new film about characters from the well-known Disney story. *Mufasa: The Lion King* is a prequel to the original tale, which was told in films in 1994 and 2019. It revolved around young lion Simba, whose father, Mufasa, was the legendary king of the Pride Lands. The new film focuses on Mufasa's life as an orphaned cub and his rise to greatness. It has songs by Lin-Manuel Miranda, known for *Hamilton*, *Moana*, and *Encanto*. It opens in theaters on December 20.

Mufasa, directed by award-winning filmmaker Barry Jenkins,



Blue Ivy Carter

was made in the same style as *The Lion King* from 2019. It has realistic-looking animals that were brought to life with computer-generated imagery. The film begins after the events of *The Lion King*, when Simba defeats his evil uncle, Scar, and assumes power. However, the film soon turns into a flashback as lion cub Kiara, Simba's daughter, hears about her grandfather's life and relationship with his adopted brother, Taka (later known as Scar). In a speech at Cinemacon, Jenkins said it "will help kids understand how people who are great become the way they are." The voice cast includes music star Beyoncé Knowles-

Carter as Kiara's mother, Nala, and her daughter, Blue Ivy Carter, age 12, as Kiara.

As a teen, Jenkins used to watch the 1994 version of *The Lion King* while babysitting his nephews. He said he remembered how the film taught the boys about subjects such as grief, friendship, and leadership, and he hopes *Mufasa* will have the same impact.

Miranda said what he loves about the new film is how it gives a new perspective on who Mufasa and Scar really are. "There's no good and evil, there's just choices that we all make," he told Fandango. He said the lion brothers' backstory is not what he expected and added, "I think people are going to be really surprised."

3 facts about lions



Special markings

Lion cubs are born with dark spots called rosettes that help camouflage them in the wild while adult lions go out and hunt for food. The spots fade as they grow older and are typically gone by adulthood.

Loud and proud

Lions are the only cat species that live in groups, which are called prides. They are also the only big cats that roar as a group. Roars can be heard up to five miles away, and the sound usually lasts about 40 seconds.



Popular symbol

In many cultures, lions represent strength, royalty, and protection. One can be found biting a bull on the Gate of All Nations (above) in the ruins of the city of Persepolis, an ancient capital located in what is now Iran.



Arts and entertainment



DID YOU KNOW?

It's estimated that people spend an average of two hours a night dreaming.



An *Inside Out* spin-off series

Dream Productions is a new animated comedy series that is a spin-off of the popular *Inside Out* films. Like the movies, the show takes place in the mind of a girl named Riley—but instead of focusing on her emotions, it centers on the characters that create her dreams. The four-episode series is now on Disney+.

The series is a mockumentary (funny fictional documentary) set between the events of *Inside Out* and *Inside Out 2*, when Riley is 12 years old. She and some of her emotions appear in scenes, but the main character is Paula Persimmon, Riley's dream director. Paula's dreams have become unmemorable, so she has to work with another director. But they disagree about what is best for Riley.

Valerie LaPointe, one of Dream Productions' directors, told *The Week Junior* that when the idea for the series was being discussed, the focus was



Valerie LaPointe

on dreams "and how weird they are, how they change as you get older, and what dreams do for us." The series' creators spoke to scientists who study dreams and learned that they may help people process things in their lives that they don't know how to handle. "We can play it out in our head like a movie so that when we wake up, we may have a way of dealing with it," LaPointe said. There are several dreams in the series, including one with a dance party that *Inside Out* fans will recognize. LaPointe said viewers can also look for hidden movie posters with fun titles.

In addition to focusing on dreams, the series is also about being open-minded. "We see how important it is when you're creating something to not always be stuck in your ways—and how much better something can be when you let go of doing it by yourself," LaPointe said.



Do you have a film or TV show to recommend to other kids? Send your review to hello@theweekjunior.com.

READER RECOMMENDS

Red One PG-13 (In theaters)

"This is a comedy and an action movie. The main characters are Santa Claus, whose name is Nick and is known as Red One; his head of security, Callum Drift; and a bounty hunter, Jack O'Malley, who is my favorite character. The movie is about Santa Claus being taken and held prisoner. Callum and Jack have to go on different adventures to get Santa back. Jack is a dad who doesn't have a great relationship with his son. I recommend this movie because it made me feel good when it brought Jack and his son together." Jesse, 14, Ohio



THIS WEEK'S



The Secret Lives of Animals

(Apple TV+)

There are 77 animal species from 24 countries in this new documentary series. Highlights include never-before-seen behaviors, such as a spider building a decoy to confuse predators, a wood mouse using landmarks to navigate, and an unlikely bond between a frog and a tarantula.



Human vs. Hamster

(Max)

This new wacky competition series is from the producers of *Floor Is Lava*. Watch as humans test their strength, agility, speed, and eating skills against those of hamsters. Every challenge, including a fun obstacle course called The Cage, is made in human size and hamster size.



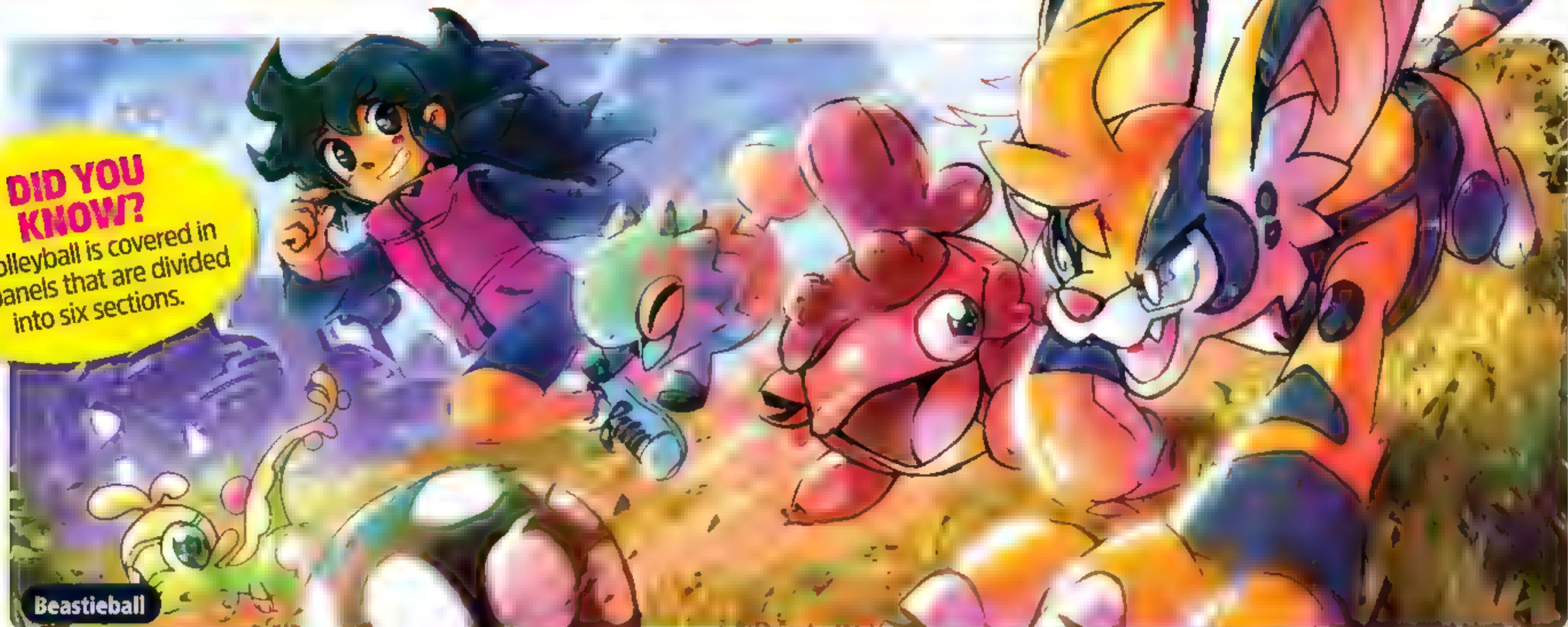
SpongeBob & Sandy's Country Christmas

(Paramount+)

In this stop-motion *SpongeBob SquarePants* special, Sandy Cheeks' latest invention causes an accident that leaves Santa unable to deliver presents. Sandy's family teams up with SpongeBob and friends to help save the day.



On screen



Game with volleyball and beasts

Beastieball is a new sports role-playing game. It was recently released for early access on the PC. In early access, a game is available to purchase even though its developer may not be ready to officially release it. The money earned on sales of the game is used to help finish making it, and people who buy it early automatically receive all updates and the final build.

The game is set in a colorful and cartoonish world and has the same basic setup as the classic Pokémon video game: A young trainer sets out to capture creatures called Beasties, train them, and defeat eight gym leaders on their way to greatness. In Beastieball, however, instead of trainers commanding their creatures to fight against each other, they coach them through two-on-two volleyball matches—also known as beastieball. The matches are turn-based and very collaborative.

Points are awarded for placing the ball where other players can't reach it. You can also win by knocking out the other team's players.

You play as a trainer who sets out to climb the beastieball rankings in order to save your home gym. You can bond with the Beasties as you catch them, teach them advanced skills, and help them bond with other Beasties. There are more than 100 creatures so far, such as Cherrily (a fluffy insect),

Turtaneer (a pirate-like turtle), and Crabaret (a dancing crab).

Teamwork is a huge part of the game, and in a new twist on the genre, players can coach their Beasties to have different relationships. They can be friends, partners, rivals, or even sweethearts. The moves they learn to execute together are determined by their relationship, so you can try out teammate combinations and find different ways to navigate your matches.



Cherrily

PODCAST OF THE WEEK

SIX MINUTES: OUT OF TIME

Major podcast platforms

This mystery series is about Holiday, a girl who has mysterious powers and no memory of her past. Season four is underway, and it began with Holiday and her adopted sister finding two teens who've lost their memories, too. Meanwhile, two other main characters are stuck in a different time period.



WEBSITE OF THE WEEK

ASTRONOMY PICTURE OF THE DAY

tinyurl.com/TWJUS-Astronomy

Every day on this site, NASA, the US space agency, shares a stunning image captured by its satellites. You can explore daily posts dating back to 2015 and find images that include oyster star clusters, interacting galaxies observed by the James Webb Telescope, and a volcano erupting in Chile.

APP OF THE WEEK

LETTER BURP

Apple App Store, Google Play

Test your spelling skills with this funny game. A mouth burps out random alphabet letters, and your task is to rotate and stack them to spell a word. If your word is correct and your tower of stacked letters is balanced, the mouth will swallow it and give you a new set of letters to arrange.



Book club

BOOK OF THE WEEK

Let It Glow

By Marissa Meyer and Joanne Levy
(Feiwel and Friends)

Aviva and Holly can't believe their eyes when they run into each other at sign-ups for the holiday pageant at the senior center where Aviva's grandmother lives. Except for a slightly different hairstyle and a freckle, they look exactly alike. After talking, they realize they're both adopted and have the same birthday. They think they're identical twins! Instead of sharing the news

with their parents right away, they ask each other questions about their adoptions. They believe their families don't

know that their birth mother had twins. At a rehearsal for the pageant, Aviva's younger brother thinks Holly is Aviva. Since their own family members can't tell them apart, the girls decide to swap houses for a few days. Holly is excited to celebrate Hanukkah, and Aviva wants to enjoy Christmas activities. While trading places, they have some close calls. Holly doesn't speak Hebrew, for instance, and Aviva can't ice skate as well as Holly can. Still, they keep up the ruse and plan to reveal their secret at the pageant. But when Aviva's brother catches on, will their surprise be foiled? Each chapter in the book alternates between the perspectives of Aviva and Holly. This heartwarming story is sure to get you in the holiday spirit.



Joanne Levy

We spoke to a co-author of the Book of the Week.

How did you and your co-author, Marissa Meyer, divide the writing?

I wrote Aviva's character and Marissa wrote Holly's character. When Aviva and Holly swapped homes, we also swapped characters.

Which character do you most relate to?

I relate to Aviva because I have a big family and I was raised in a Jewish home. But as far as personality, I relate more to Holly, who is a quiet introvert.

What are the important themes in the book?

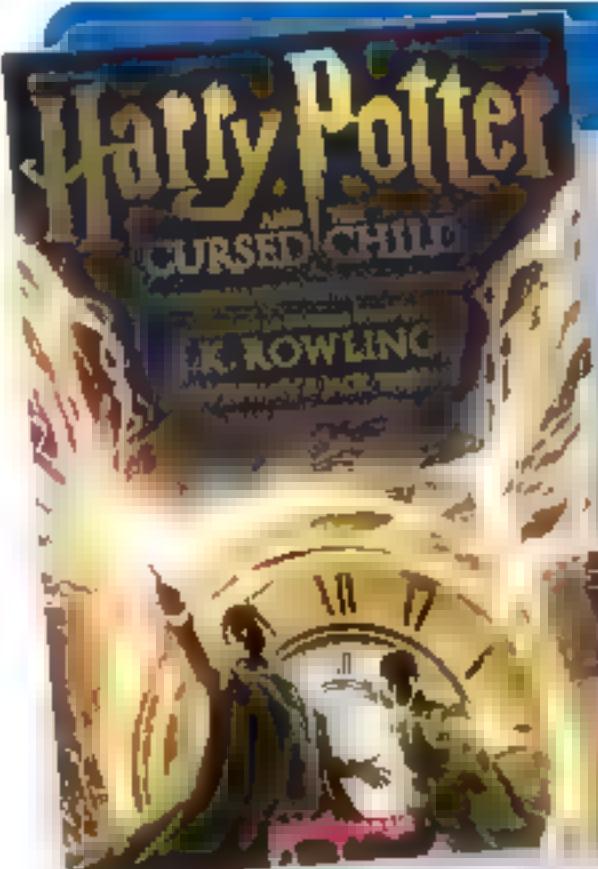
Learning to feel comfortable in your own skin is a big theme, and facing your fears is another one.

Do you have hobbies?

I was crafty as a child. I knitted, crocheted, and did macramé wall hangings. I would do any craft you put in front of me. Today, I really enjoy needle felting.

Favorite holiday tradition?

Being with family.

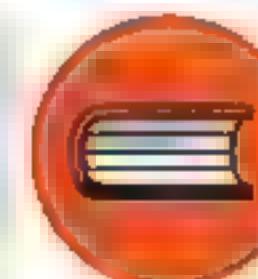


READER RECOMMENDS

Harry Potter and the Cursed Child By J.K. Rowling

"This book takes place when Harry is married and has a child. His son, Albus Potter, is sorted into the Slytherin House. Later in the book, Albus tries to fix one of his dad's mistakes, the murder of Cedric Diggory. But by trying to change history, the Dark Lord survives and the future is changed. Can Albus and his friend Scorpius put everything back to normal?" Elias, 8, Texas

Do you have a book to recommend? Send your review to hello@theweekjunior.com.



4 new books full of fascinating facts

These 2025 almanacs and record books capture amazing highlights.



Guinness World Records 2025

By Guinness World Records
(Guinness World Records)

The 70th-anniversary edition of this book, popular for its list of amazing records, begins with a special chapter on heroes from every US state. The "Recordmania" chapter contains photos of fun collections and is especially enjoyable to read. Ages 8 and up



Minecraft Annual 2025

By Mojang AB
(Farshore)

It's the 15th anniversary of Minecraft, and this book contains the latest tips and tricks for having more fun while playing the video game. Find out how to survive a pillager raid and discover new builds. It also includes survival challenges and a blocky brownie recipe. Ages 8 and up



National Geographic Kids Almanac 2025

By National Geographic Kids
(National Geographic Kids)

Packed with about 500 photos, this book is full of interesting facts about animals, science, technology, and more. For example, you'll find out how seals help scientists learn about the ocean. The book also includes maps, games, puzzles, and jokes. Ages 8 and up



Scholastic Year in Sports 2025

By James Buckley
(Scholastic Inc.)

The top moments in sports in 2024 are captured in this book. It kicks off with awards, including one for quarterback Brock Purdy. He was chosen last in the National Football League draft but led the San Francisco 49ers to the Super Bowl in 2024. The book also recaps the Paris Olympics. Ages 8 and up



How to...



SPIRIT OF GIVING

This year Americans gave a record \$3.6 billion on Giving Tuesday, an annual day in November that is dedicated to doing good.

Give gifts with meaning

The best presents for the people you care about don't have to cost a thing.

Exchanging gifts at the holidays is a tradition that dates back thousands of years. Children are typically excused from buying gifts because they cost money kids may not have. But the truth is that some of the best gifts don't cost anything. If you would like to give meaningful gifts to family or friends at the holidays—without having to spend money—here's how you can get started.

Consider the recipient

First, think about the person who will be receiving your gift. What are their interests and hobbies, or what foods do they like? What might they enjoy receiving that would tie in with those interests? For example, if they enjoy music, you can make them a personalized playlist or round up other young family members and give a musical performance. If they like baked goods, you can bake up something delicious for them. (You can find holiday recipes, crafts, and more at kids.theweekjunior.com/activities.)



Create a memory keepsake

Another meaningful gift is a photo collage. With an adult's help, print out pictures of some of your favorite memories with the gift recipient, then glue them to a piece of cardstock. Another idea is to write a list or letter about why the recipient is special, print it out,

and place it in a frame made out of construction paper. You can also record and send a thoughtful video message highlighting why you love them or recalling one of your favorite memories together.

Share the gift of time

One of the best gifts you can give the people you love is time with you. With some cardstock or construction paper, make a few "tickets" for future outings and put them in a gift box. For example, if they enjoy hiking, create a ticket to "go on a hike together." If they like movies, you can write "share a movie night." You could also give the gift of spending time volunteering together for the cause of their choice. For example, the two of you could gather old sheets or towels to bring to an animal shelter, clean up a park or beach, or serve side-by-side at a soup kitchen.

Help make their lives easier

Another creative gift that doesn't cost a cent is to make a gift jar of chores. Use wood craft sticks or pieces of paper to write down ways you can assist a family member. For example, you could write "make dinner," "walk the dog," or "shovel the driveway." Then put the chores inside an upcycled glass jar. Give the jar as a gift and invite the recipient to choose a task when they need your help.

3 ways to exchange



Names in a hat If you have a big group of friends or family, you can simplify gift giving by having each person pick a recipient. Put names in a hat, and take turns choosing. Gather again to exchange presents.

Thrift exchange Organize a gift swap: Everyone brings an item in good condition that they no longer want. If you like, choose a theme like toys or clothes. Each person can bring one item to set out, then everyone can "shop" for a gift for themselves.

Yankee gift swap In this gift exchange, each person brings a wrapped present and chooses a different gift to unwrap. Once the gifts are opened, guests can decide to swap them until they get one they're happy with!

How to...



GLOBAL LEADER

Most of the world's cocoa—about 70%—is produced on small family-owned farms in West Africa.

WARNING!
Ask an adult's permission before using the stove.

Make holiday hot cocoa pudding cups

Ingredients

- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- ¼ cup cornstarch
- Large pinch salt
- 2 cups heavy cream
- 1 tablespoon vanilla extract
- 2 tablespoons butter

Toppings

- Whipped cream
- Mini marshmallows
- Crushed peppermint candies, sprinkles, or nonpareils

Instructions

1. Combine the sugar, cocoa powder, cornstarch, and salt in a medium saucepan and whisk to combine, breaking up any lumps.
2. Set the saucepan over medium heat and slowly add the cream, whisking constantly. Continue whisking until the mixture is heated through and is thick and smooth, about 8 minutes.
3. Remove pan from heat and stir in the vanilla extract and butter until fully incorporated.
4. Divide pudding between 6 small espresso cups or teacups. Transfer pudding to the refrigerator to cool. Before serving, top with your choice of whipped cream, mini marshmallows, and/or candies and sprinkles. Makes 6 servings.



ECO TIP OF THE WEEK

WRAP GIFTS SUSTAINABLY

Most wrapping paper that is used to wrap presents gets thrown away during the holiday season. Creating extra waste can harm the environment because gift wrap and ribbons take up space in a landfill. However, there are ways you can wrap your gifts nicely while still being mindful of the Earth. One option is to wrap items in brown kraft paper or paper shopping bags. This paper can be recycled or composted (turned into a mixture that improves soil), making it more environmentally friendly. You can tie packages with string you already have at home or reuse holiday decor to add special touches. Another option is to use gift bags, as they can easily be repurposed.



Use paper that can be recycled.



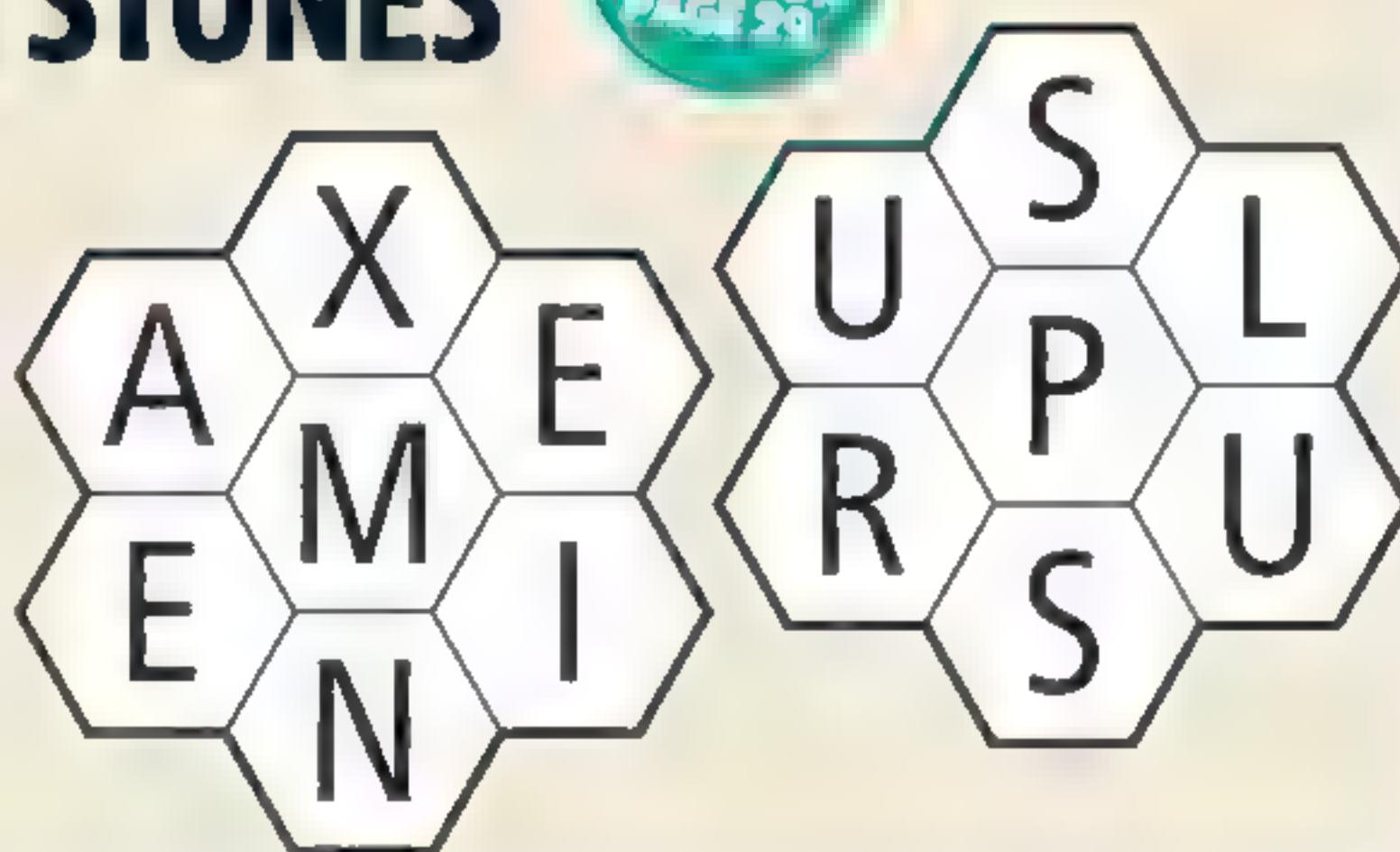
Word ladder

To change the word TAKE into the word ROOT, use each clue to fill in a word that is only one letter different from the word before it. If you get stuck, try solving from the bottom up.



STEPPING STONES

Each figure hides a seven-letter word that begins and ends with the same letter. To find each one, start anywhere and move in an unbroken path through letters that share a border (no jumping!), using each letter once.



Answers
CAN BE
FOUND ON
PAGE 29

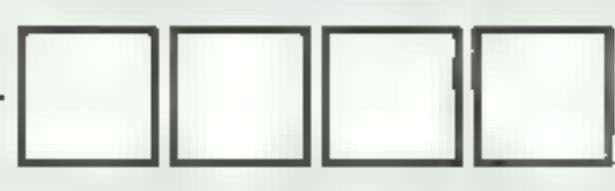
TAKE



It might be seven layers or upside down



Something a detective like Nate the Great works on



Group that performs a play



Information written on a price tag



Was defeated in a sports event



A space high in a barn, just below the roof



Like ice cream that comes out in a swirl

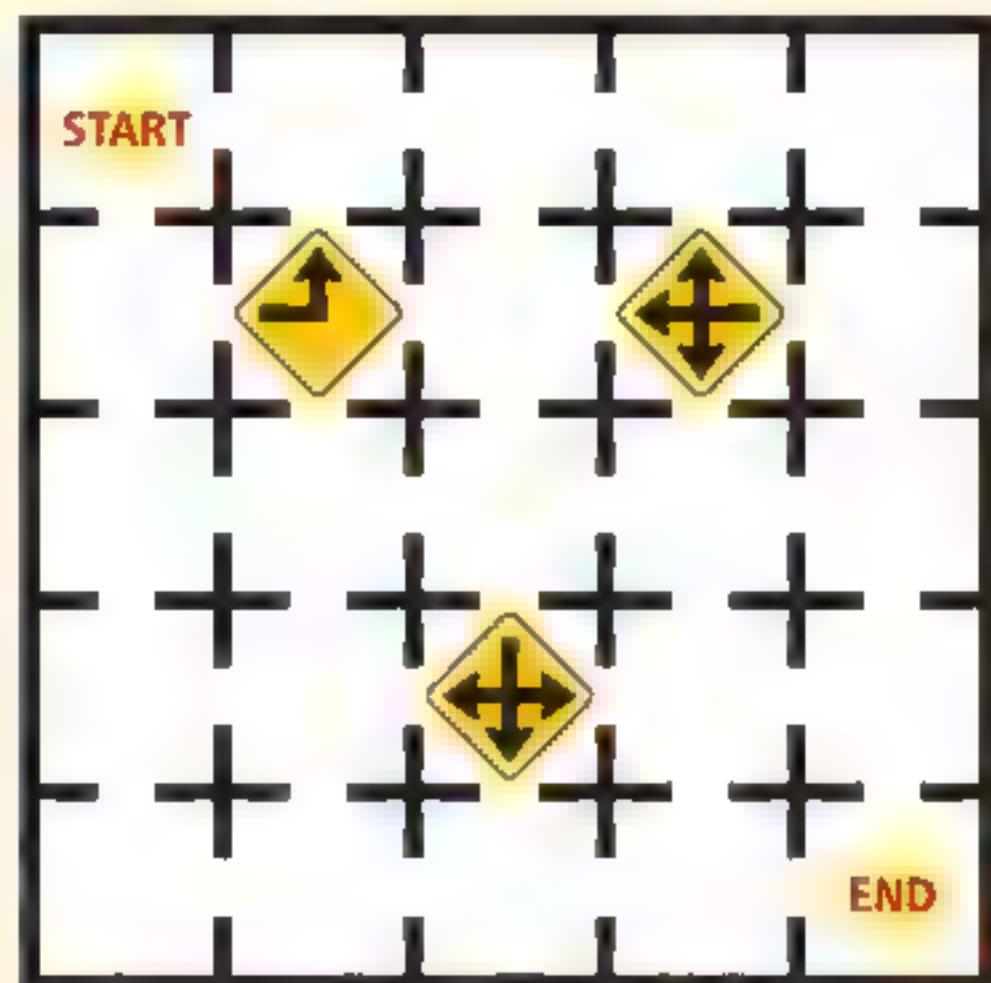


It might be on a chimney sweep's face

ROOT

DETOURS

Draw one continuous path from START to END that goes through every single square without crossing itself. For squares with signs, you may only enter at the arrow's base, and you may only make a turn in the direction of an arrow shown.



Crossmath

Fill each empty box with a number or a mathematical symbol (+, -, ×, or ÷) to complete the equations across and down. A symbol can be used more than once. (NEED A HINT? Check the bottom of the page.)

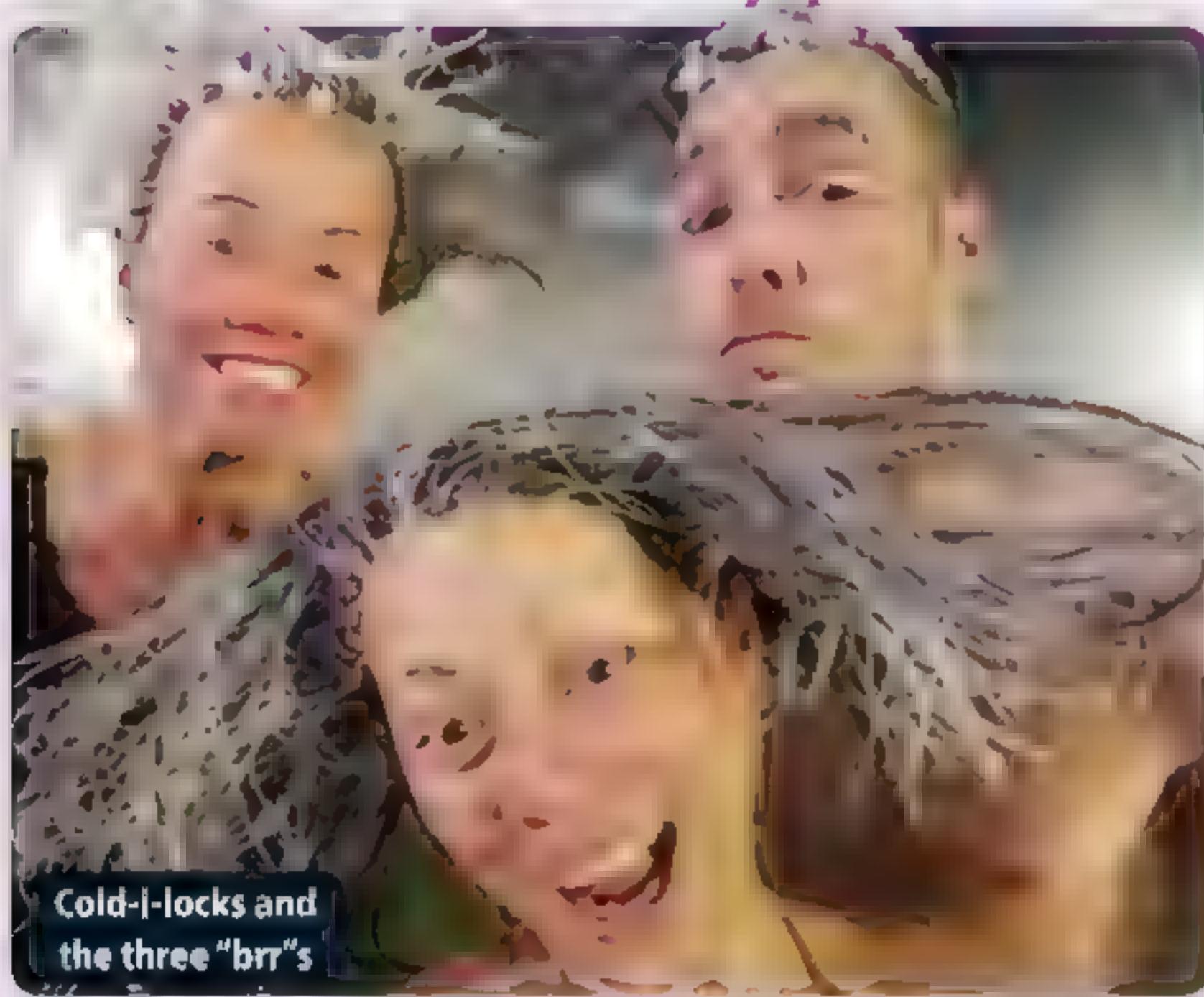
	63		
18		=	
7			5
=			
	35	= 44	
			30

Spot the difference

These two pictures of holiday gifts appear to be the same, but take a closer look. There are actually five differences. Can you see them?



That's unbelievable!



Winter's coolest hairstyles

When the cold takes hold in Canada's Yukon province, people can make art with their frozen hair. Once temperatures drop below 4° F—usually sometime between December and March—Eclipse Nordic Hot Springs invites guests to take a dip in its 108° F pools, where steam collects in bathers' hair and then freezes. Visitors style their hair in wacky ways and pose for photos, entering what is believed to be the world's only hair-freezing contest. Cash prizes are awarded in categories such as most creative, best facial hair, and a people's choice award.



Rocketing to a paper record

Florida's Orlando Science Center claimed a world record when 262 people successfully launched paper rockets at the same time. Paper rockets are toys made entirely of paper that fit onto a straw. When someone blows through the straw, the rocket sails into the air. The launch took place last month at the science center's CineDome, beating the previous record of 250 people and earning a place in the 2025 Guinness World Records Book. A science center official said the achievement felt as exciting as "the Super Bowl, Oscars, and World Series all in one."



Creative cake art on display

Masterpieces by 1,500 bakers, artists, and chefs from around the world went on display at Cake International last month. The show, held in the UK, is the world's biggest cake-decorating and baking event and has been running for 30 years. Highlights this year included cake versions of Queen Elizabeth I and Dogpool, a character from the *Deadpool & Wolverine* movie. There was also a 7-foot-tall birthday cake to celebrate Cake International's anniversary. One baker made a life-size Taylor Swift cake, but it collapsed on the way to the event.



Flight halted by hamsters

A plane got stuck in Ponta Delgada, Portugal, for four days after more than 100 hamsters escaped from the cargo hold. Along with human passengers, the aircraft was carrying ferrets, birds, and other critters from the capital city of Lisbon to a local pet store. When it landed, damaged boxes and scurrying hamsters were seen in the baggage hold, so the plane was held back from flying until all the rodents were recaptured. Is this story real, or are the facts a little fuzzy?*

the plane finally took off for its return flight to Lisbon.

*Really! Workers kept the plane on the ground out of concern that the hamsters could tinker with the plane's electrical wiring. After a roundup of all 132 rodents,



Your turn

Editor's note

The second-to-last issue of each calendar year is always one of my favorites because that's when we have the honor of announcing the winner of our annual Winter Cover Contest (p14). This year we received more than 2,000 entries—the highest number ever! We carefully considered each one and then faced the difficult task of choosing our 10 finalists and ultimately our winner. Congratulations to Josie, our grand prize recipient, for her drawing titled "Penguin Love," which captivated us with its artistic quality as well as its charm! Congratulations, also, to runners-up Anavi and Masooma and all our finalists. Thank you, as well, to every child who entered the contest. Each one of you impressed us! Our appreciation also goes to our esteemed judges—author/illustrators Johnnie Christmas, Chanel Miller, and Brian Selznick—all of whom agreed with us that the quality of the submissions was outstanding!



Andrea Barbalich
Editor-in-Chief



CHARITY OF THE WEEK



Toys for Tots

This organization provides new toys for children for the holidays. It conducts a national drive to gather unused toys and gives them to children through its partners located across the country. It also provides support to children in need throughout the year. Since its founding in 1991, Toys for Tots has distributed about 677 million toys to 301 million children.

Find out more at
toysfortots.org.



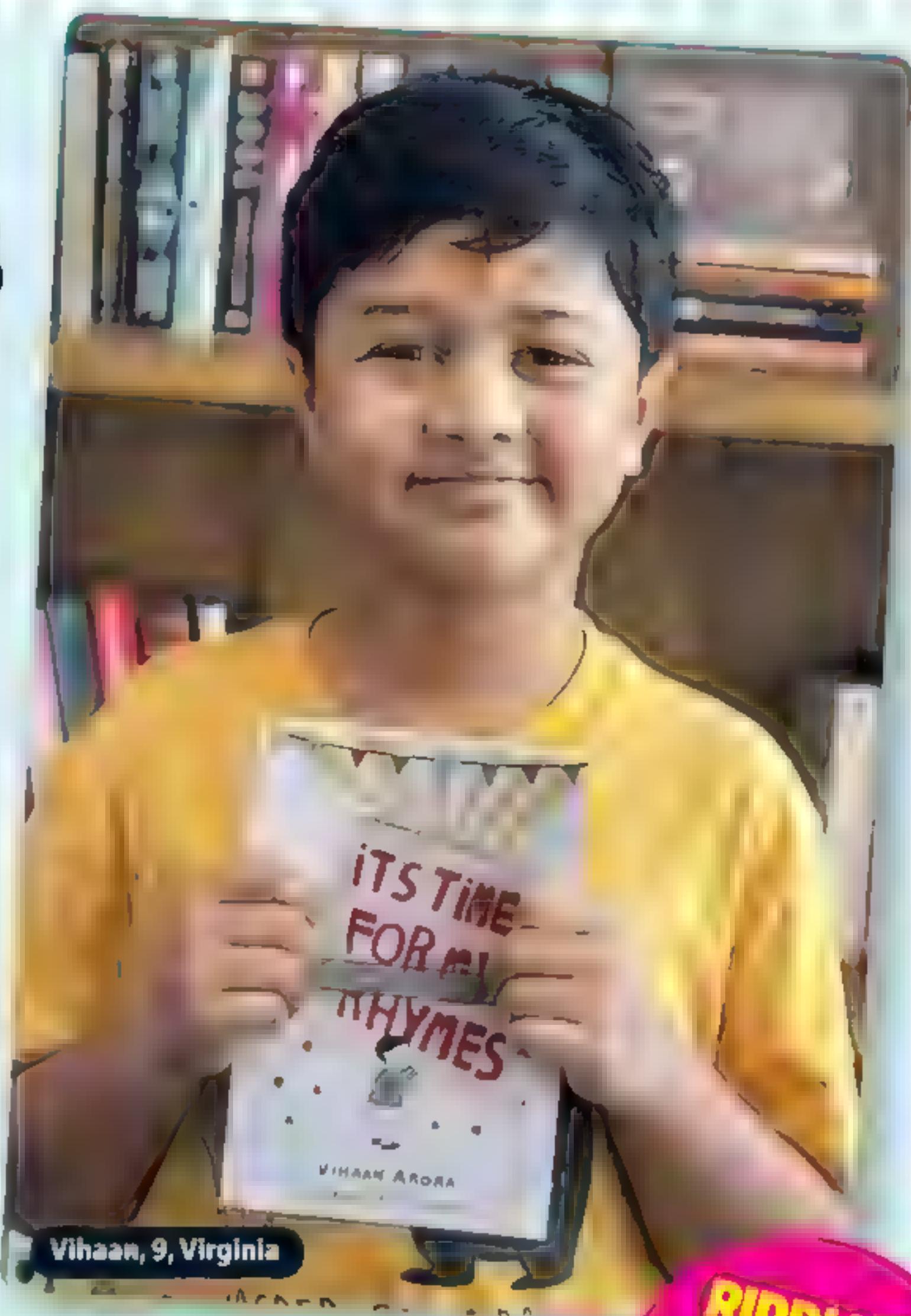
THE WEEK
Junior

IT'S YOUR TURN

Email your news, views, and photos
to hello@theweekjunior.com

A passion for poems

“For me, it started with three familiar words: 'I am bored.' During some of those slow moments last summer, I spent time doing my three favorite things: reading, writing, and listening to rap songs. Then I combined these passions and began writing rhyming poems, which I compiled into a book called *It's Time for My Rhymes*. While some of my poems are fantasy, others are about the world around us. I donate all the money raised from the sales of my book to an organization that helps children around the world get a better education and access to library books.”



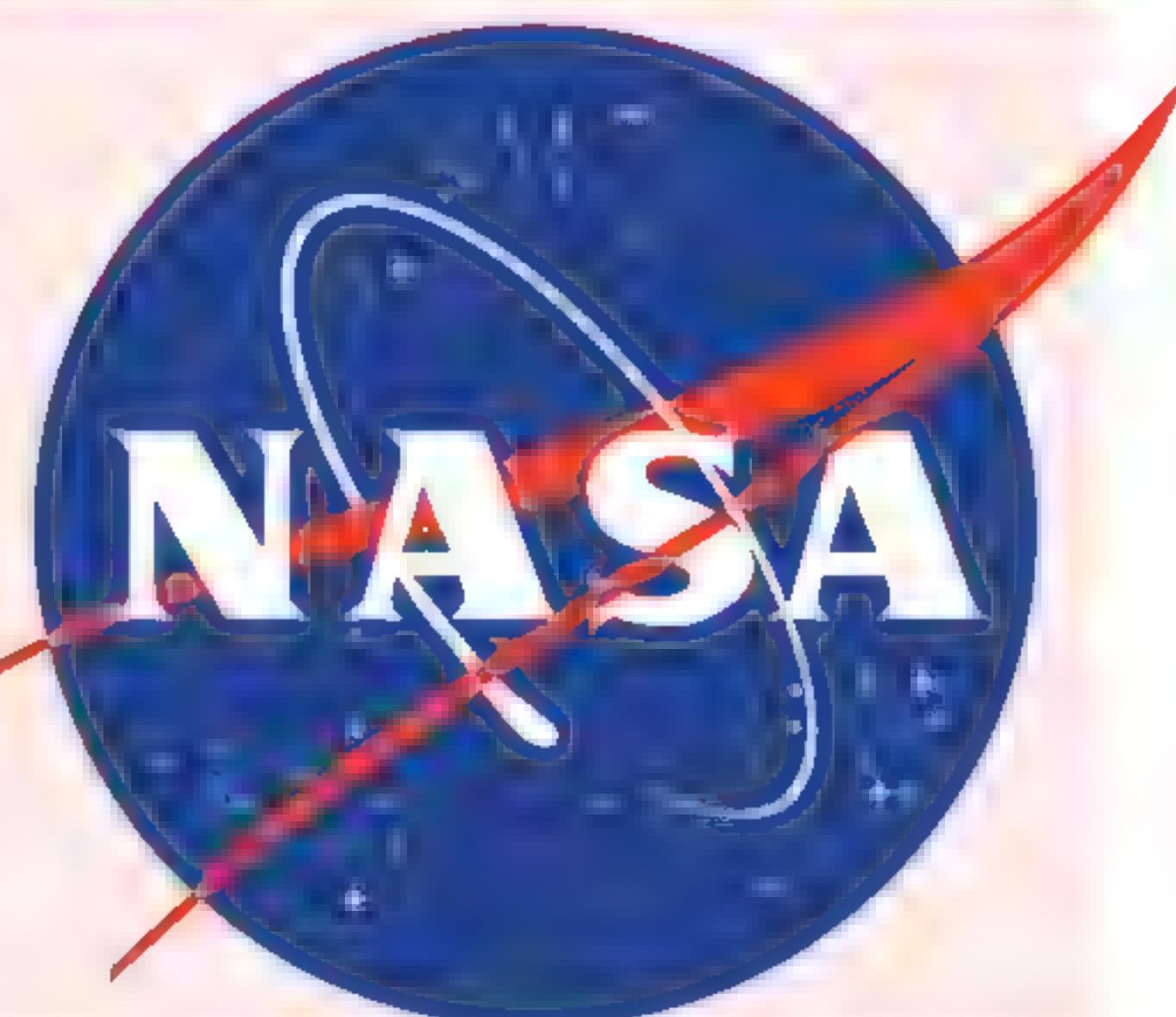
Vihaan, 9, Virginia

Have you done something interesting or raised money for a cause you care about? Whatever you're up to, we want to hear about it at hello@theweekjunior.com.

RIDDLE OF THE WEEK
What gets smaller the more you add to it?
A hole

NATIONWIDE CONTEST OPPORTUNITY

NASA, the US space agency, has launched its fourth annual Power to Explore Student Challenge. Students in grades K-12 are invited to write an essay about their idea for a nuclear-powered mission to a moon in the solar system. Essays should include details on where they would go, what they would explore, and how they would use radioisotope power systems, a type of nuclear battery. You can find out more about the contest, including when and how to apply, at tinyurl.com/TWJUS-NASAcontest.



Your turn



YOUR PHOTOS

We'd love to see pictures you've taken or pictures with you in them! Have an adult email them to us at hello@theweekjunior.com, along with anything you would like us to know about what's happening in the photo.



"I'm still laughing over the fact that Fat Bear Week is a real thing!" **Alina, 10, Illinois**

"I love the Science and Technology pages because I like learning about interesting inventions." **Nick, 11, Massachusetts**



"I made the extra-crispy cheese quesadillas from the magazine and they were yum!" **Atticus, 12, California**

Teacher of the Week



Teacher's Name: Ms. Podgurski
School: Normal Park Museum Magnet

"I am nominating Ms. Pod because she is so kind to all her students. She always comes to school happy and brings cheer every day. She is also really funny. I love all the cool projects we do in class, and we recently finished reading the book *Esperanza Rising*.

Ms. Pod brings joy to every student, and she cares about others."

Georgia, 10, Tennessee

Nominate your teacher for Teacher of the Week!

Send your reason for the nomination, a photo of your teacher, and your school's name and address to hello@theweekjunior.com.

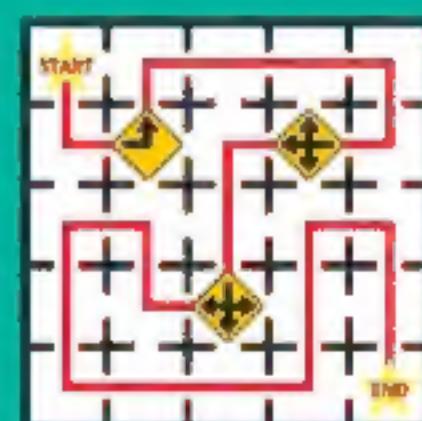
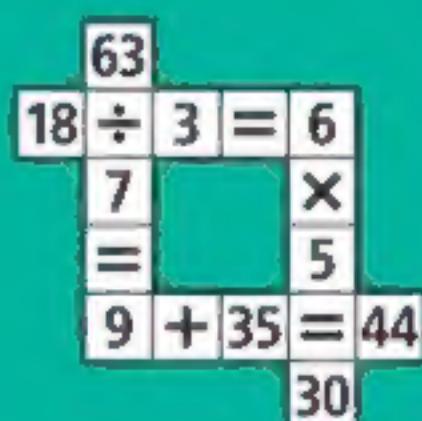
GETTY IMAGES, ON LEFT PAGE: ALAMY, GETTY IMAGES



Puzzle answers (from page 26)

Word ladder

TAKE
CAKE
CASE
CAST
COST
LOST
LOFT
SOFT
SOOT
ROOT



Stepping stones
examine, surplus



Quiz answers (from page 30)

1 b) Gothic 2 True 3 Volleyball 4 False. They become less social. 5 c) Taylor Swift
6 Brazil 7 c) Football 8 True 9 a) Typing 10 True 11 Pysanka 12 False. He is her grandfather. 13 b) Stegosaurus 14 Hanukkah 15 b) 4° F

We want to hear from you! To have your letters, photos, nominations, recommendations, or ideas considered for inclusion in the magazine, please include your full name, age, and state with your submission. By emailing your submission to us, you give *The Week Junior* consent to publish it in the magazine and online. Please get your parent/guardian's permission before sending anything to us.



Quiz

How much of this week's news can you remember?

1 Notre-Dame Cathedral is an example of what kind of architecture?

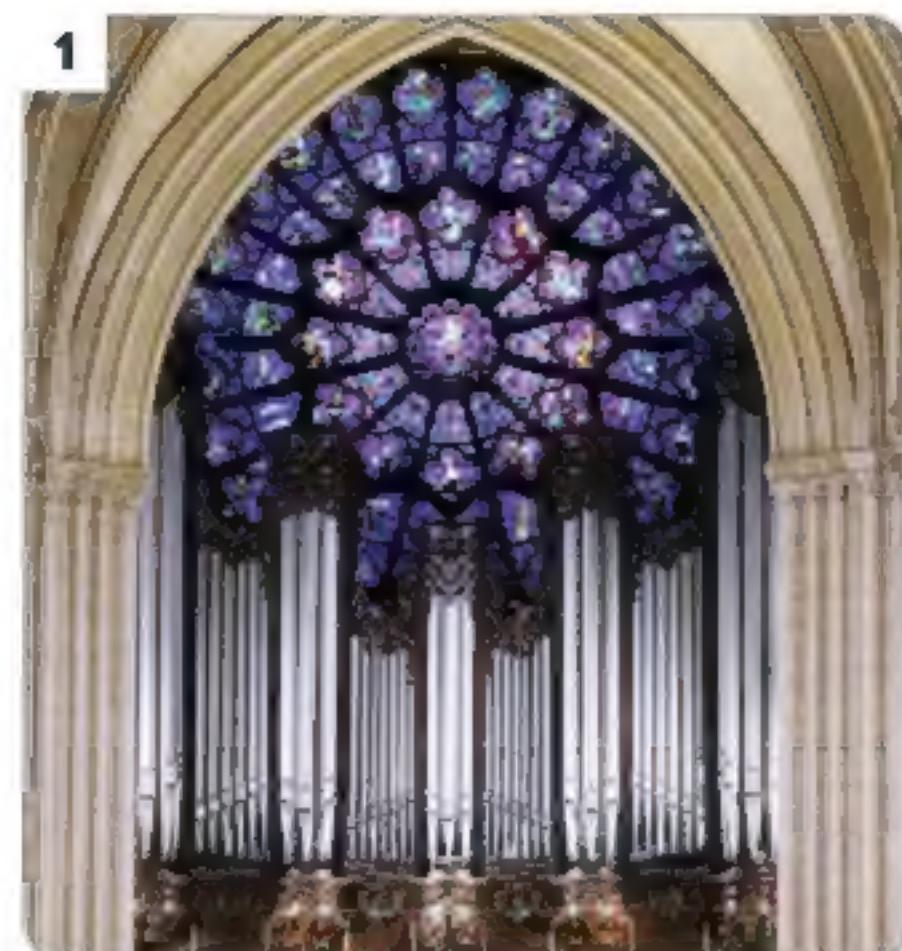
- a) Classical
- b) Gothic
- c) Renaissance

a b c

2 True or false? Ancient Maya cities had pyramids and ball courts.

True False

3 In the video game Beastieball, what sport do the creatures compete in?



4 True or false? Social aging is a trend in which animals become more social as they get older.

True False

5 Who was the most-streamed artist on Spotify worldwide in 2024?

- a) Morgan Wallen
- b) Sabrina Carpenter
- c) Taylor Swift

a b c

6 In what country was the miniature frog species *Brachycephalus dacnis* discovered?



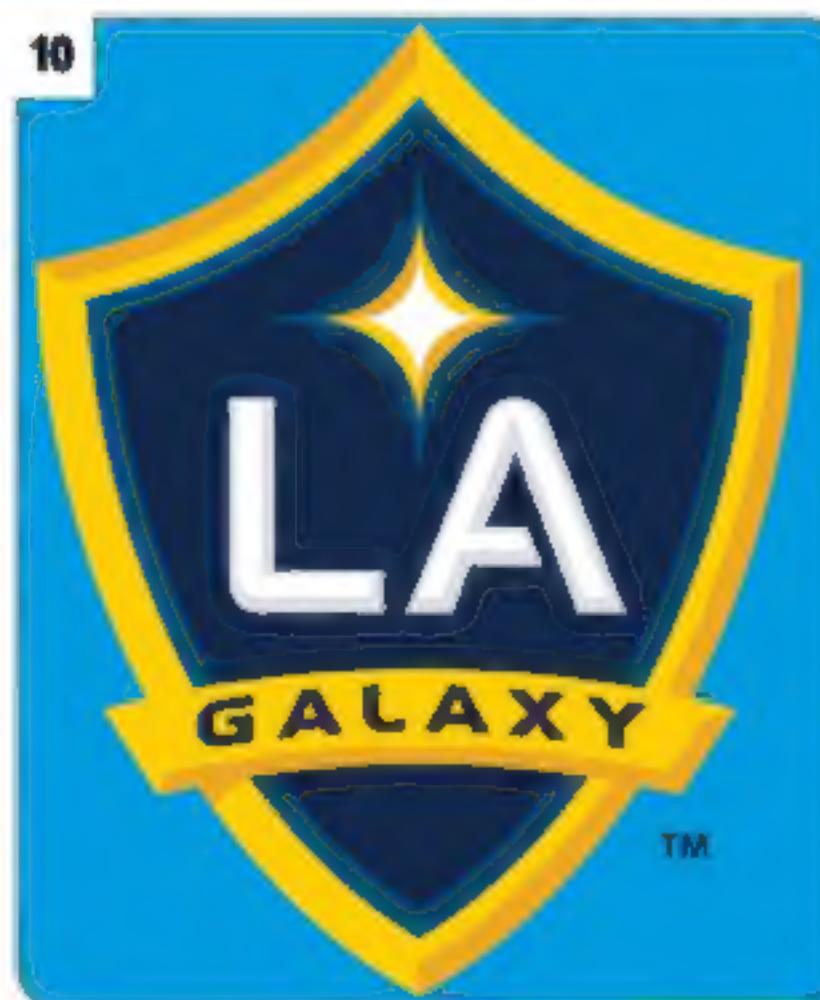
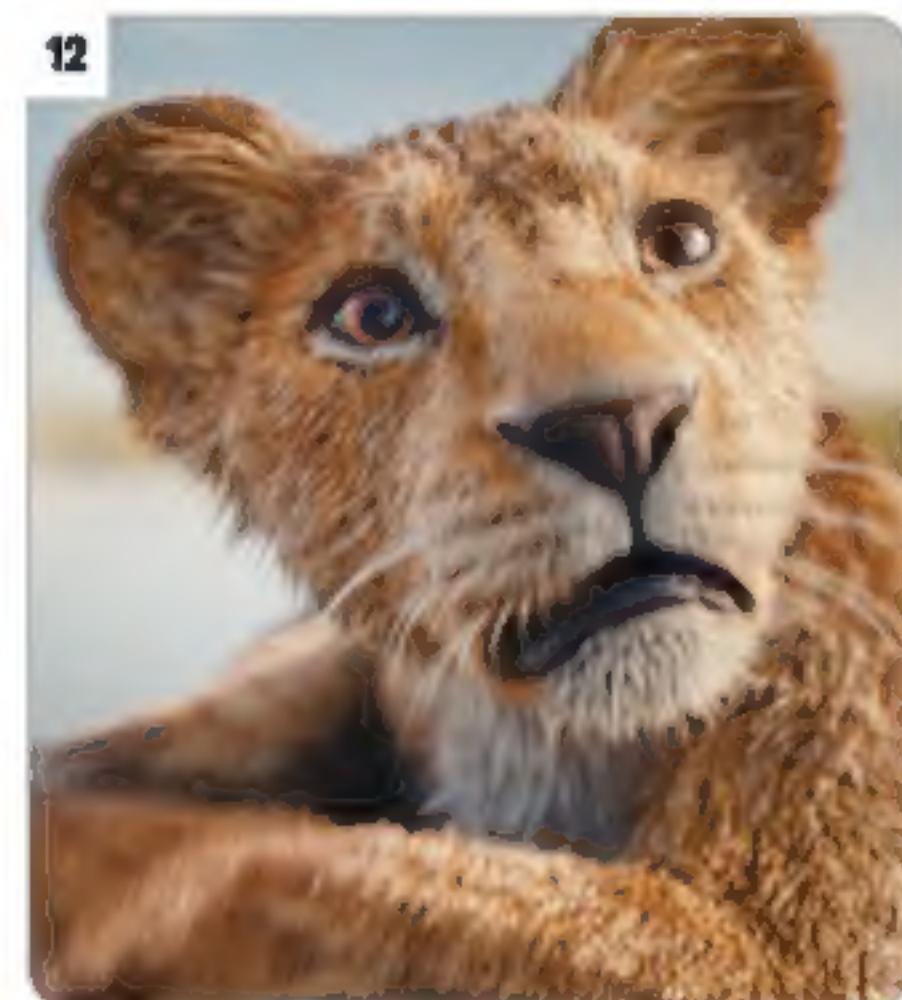
7 Armando Villarreal does custom artwork on what kind of sports helmets?

- a) Baseball
- b) Hockey
- c) Football

a b c

8 True or false? Marissa Bode is the first actor who uses a wheelchair in real life to play the character of Nessarose in *Wicked*.

True False



Reader submissions: hello@theweekjunior.com

Customer service: TW/custserv@cdsfulfillment.com

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Chief Executive Officer Jon Steinberg
Non-Executive Chairman Richard Huntingford
Chief Financial Officer Sharjeel Suleman
Tel: 44-01225 442 244

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Editor-in-chief: Andrea Barbalich
Executive editor: Mindy Walker
Senior editors: Joey Bartolomeo, Gail O'Connor, Alisa Partlan, Jennifer Li Shotz
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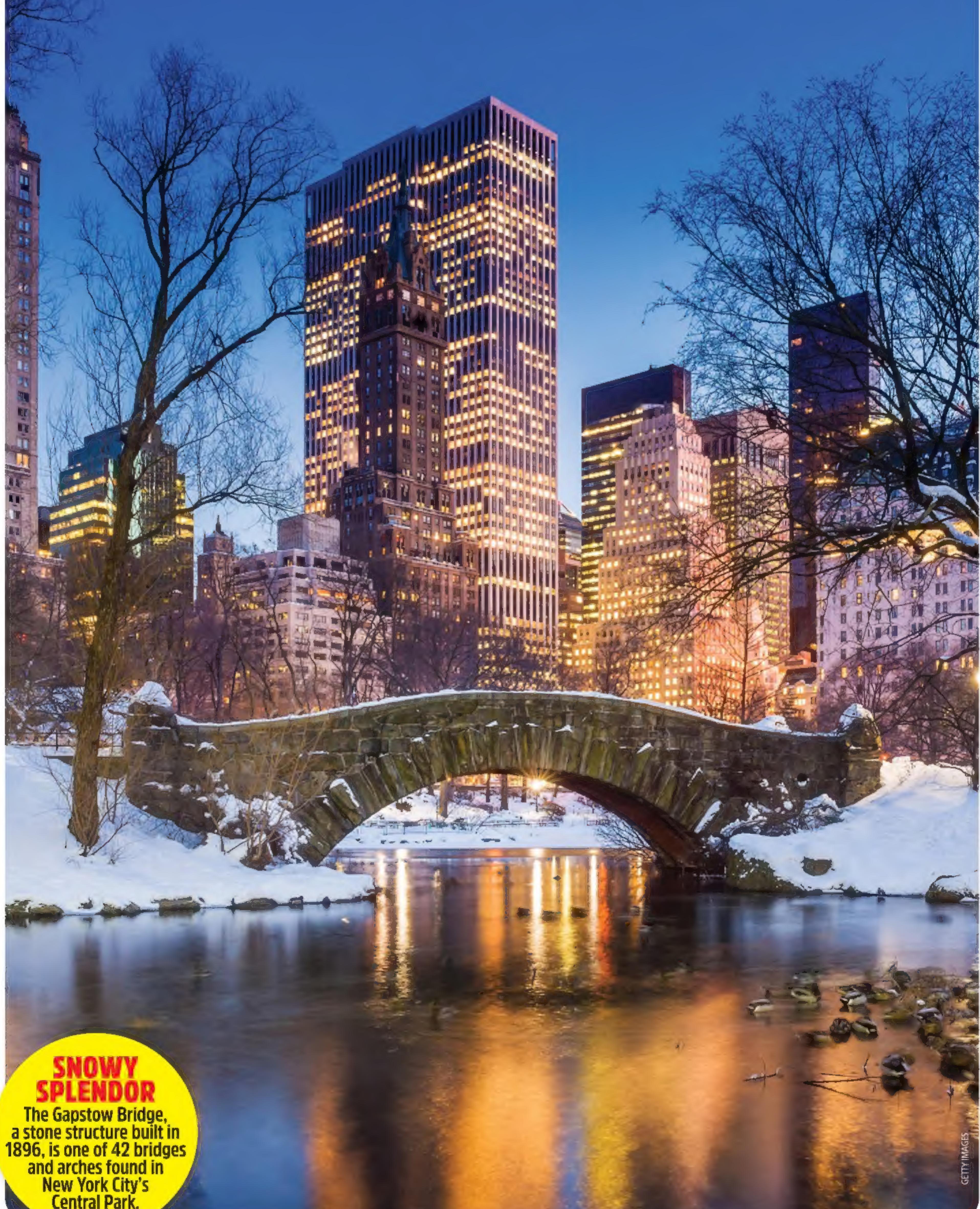
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SNOWY SPLENDOR

The Gapstow Bridge, a stone structure built in 1896, is one of 42 bridges and arches found in New York City's Central Park.